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AN "ATTIC"  
PHILOSOPHER  
→  
EMILE SOUVESTRE





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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO



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(U. S. P. L. Los Angeles)

By ÉMILE

*Crowned by the Moon*



N. L. W. Y.



(*Un Philosophe sous les Toits*)

By ÉMILE SOUVESTRE

*Crowned by the French Academy*

With a Preface by JOSEPH BERTRAND, of the French Academy



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## EMILE SOUVESTRE



O one succeeds in obtaining a prominent place in literature, or in surrounding himself with a faithful and steady circle of admirers drawn from the fickle masses of the public, unless he possesses originality, constant variety, and a distinct personality. It is quite possible to gain for a moment a few readers by imitating some original feature in another; but these soon vanish and the writer remains alone and forgotten. Others, again, without belonging to any distinct group of authors, having found their standard in themselves, moralists and educators at the same time, have obtained undying recognition.

Of the latter class, though little known outside of France, is Emile Souvestre, who was born in Morlaix, April 15, 1806, and died at Paris July 5, 1854. He was the son of a civil engineer, was educated at the college of Pontivy, and intended to follow his father's career by entering the Polytechnic School. His father, however, died in 1823, and Souvestre matriculated as a law-student at Rennes. But the young student soon devoted himself entirely to literature. His first essay, a tragedy, *Le Siège de Missolonghi* (1828), was a pronounced failure. Disheartened and disgusted he left Paris and

## INTRODUCTION

established himself first as a lawyer in Morlaix. Then he became proprietor of a newspaper, and was afterward appointed a professor in Brest and in Mulhouse. In 1836 he contributed to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* some sketches of life in Brittany, which obtained a brilliant success. Souvestre was soon made editor of *La Revue de Paris*, and in consequence early found a publisher for his first novel, *L'Echelle de Femmes*, which, as was the case with his second work, *Riche et Pauvre*, met with a very favorable reception. His reputation was now made, and between this period and his death he gave to France about sixty volumes—tales, novels, essays, history, and drama.

A double purpose was always very conspicuous in his books: he aspired to the rôle of a moralist and educator, and was likewise a most impressive painter of the life, character, and morals of the inhabitants of Brittany.

The most significant of his books are perhaps *Les Derniers Bretons* (1835–1837, 4 vols.), *Pierre Landais* (1843, 2 vols.), *Le Foyer Breton* (1844, 2 vols.), *Un Philosophe sous les Toits*, crowned by the Academy (1850), *Confessions d'un Ouvrier* (1851), *Recits et Souvenirs* (1853), *Souvenirs d'un Vieillard* (1854); also *La Bretagne Pittoresque* (1845), and, finally, *Causeries Historiques et Littéraires* (1854, 2 vols.). His comedies deserve honorable mention: *Henri Hamelin*, *L'Oncle Baptiste* (1842), *La Parisienne*, *Le Mousse*, etc. In 1848, Souvestre was appointed professor of the newly created school of administration, mostly devoted to popular lectures. He held this post till 1853, lecturing partly in Paris, partly in Switzerland.

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His death, when comparatively young, left a distinct gap in the literary world. A life like his could not be extinguished without general sorrow. Although he was unduly modest, and never aspired to the rôle of a beacon-light in literature, always seeking to remain in obscurity, the works of Emile Souvestre must be placed in the first rank by their morality and by their instructive character. They will always command the entire respect and applause of mankind. And thus it happens that, like many others, he was only fully appreciated after his death.

Even those of his *confrères* who did not seem to esteem him, when alive, suddenly found out that they had experienced a great loss in his demise. They expressed it in emotional panegyrics; contemporaneous literature discovered that virtue had flown from its bosom, and the French Academy, which had at its proper time crowned his *Philosophe sous les Toits* as a work contributing supremely to morals, kept his memory green by bestowing on his widow the “Prix Lambert,” designed for the “families of authors who by their integrity, and by the probity of their efforts have well deserved this token from the *République des Lettres*.”



de l'Académie Française.



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CHAPTER I

NEW-YEAR'S GIFTS

*January 1st*



HE day of the month came into my mind as soon as I awoke. Another year is separated from the chain of ages, and drops into the gulf of the past! The crowd hasten to welcome her young sister. But while all looks are turned toward the future, mine revert to the past. Everyone smiles upon the new queen; but, in spite of myself, I think of her whom time has just wrapped in her winding-sheet. The past year!—at least I know what she was, and what she has given me; while this one comes surrounded by all the forebodings of the unknown. What does she hide in the clouds that mantle her? Is it the storm or the sunshine? Just now it rains, and I feel my mind as gloomy as the sky. I have a holiday to-day; but what can one do on a rainy day? I walk up and down my attic out of temper, and I determine to light my fire.

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Unfortunately the matches are bad, the chimney smokes, the wood goes out! I throw down my bellows in disgust, and sink into my old armchair.

In truth, why should I rejoice to see the birth of a new year? All those who are already in the streets, with holiday looks and smiling faces—do they understand what makes them so gay? Do they even know what is the meaning of this holiday, or whence comes the custom of New-Year's gifts?

Here my mind pauses to prove to itself its superiority over that of the vulgar. I make a parenthesis in my ill-temper in favor of my vanity, and I bring together all the evidence which my knowledge can produce.

(The old Romans divided the year into ten months only; it was Numa Pompilius who added January and February. The former took its name from Janus, to whom it was dedicated. As it opened the new year, they surrounded its beginning with good omens, and thence came the custom of visits between neighbors, of wishing happiness, and of New-Year's gifts. The presents given by the Romans were symbolic. They consisted of dry figs, dates, honeycomb, as emblems of “the sweetness of the auspices under which the year should begin its course,” and a small piece of money called *stips*, which foreboded riches.)

Here I close the parenthesis, and return to my ill-humor. The little *speech*\* I have just addressed to myself has restored me my self-satisfaction, but made me more dissatisfied with others. I could now enjoy my breakfast; but the portress has forgotten my morn-

\* *Spitch*, in the original.

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ing’s milk, and the pot of preserves is empty! Anyone else would have been vexed: as for me, I affect the most supreme indifference. There remains a hard crust, which I break by main strength, and which I carelessly nibble, as a man far above the vanities of the world and of fresh rolls.

However, I do not know why my thoughts should grow more gloomy by reason of the difficulties of mastication. I once read the story of an Englishman who hanged himself because they had brought him his tea without sugar. There are hours in life when the most trifling cross takes the form of a calamity. Our tempers are like an opera-glass, which makes the object small or great according to the end you look through.

Usually, the prospect that opens out before my window delights me. It is a mountain-range of roofs, with ridges crossing, interlacing, and piled on one another, and upon which tall chimneys raise their peaks. It was but yesterday that they had an Alpine aspect to me, and I waited for the first snowstorm to see glaciers among them; to-day, I only see tiles and stone flues. The pigeons, which assisted my rural illusions, seem no more than miserable birds which have mistaken the roof for the back yard; the smoke, which rises in light clouds, instead of making me dream of the panting of Vesuvius, reminds me of kitchen preparations and dish-water; and lastly, the telegraph, that I see far off on the old tower of Montmartre, has the effect of a vile gallows stretching its arms over the city.

My eyes, thus hurt by all they meet, fall upon the great man’s house which faces my attic.

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The influence of New-Year's Day is visible there. The servants have an air of eagerness proportioned to the value of their New-Year's gifts, received or expected. I see the master of the house crossing the court with the morose look of a man who is forced to be generous; and the visitors increase, followed by shop porters who carry flowers, bandboxes, or toys. Suddenly the great gates are opened, and a new carriage, drawn by thoroughbred horses, draws up before the doorsteps. They are, without doubt, the New-Year's gift presented to the mistress of the house by her husband; for she comes herself to look at the new equipage. Very soon she gets into it with a little girl, all streaming with laces, feathers and velvets, and loaded with parcels which she goes to distribute as New-Year's gifts. The door is shut, the windows are drawn up, the carriage sets off.

Thus all the world are exchanging good wishes and presents to-day. I alone have nothing to give or to receive. Poor Solitary! I do not even know one chosen being for whom I might offer a prayer.

Then let my wishes for a happy New Year go and seek out all my unknown friends—lost in the multitude which murmurs like the ocean at my feet!

To you first, hermits in cities, for whom death and poverty have created a solitude in the midst of the crowd! unhappy laborers, who are condemned to toil in melancholy, and eat your daily bread in silence and desertion, and whom God has withdrawn from the intoxicating pangs of love and friendship!

To you, fond dreamers, who pass through life with your eyes turned toward some polar star, while you

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tread with indifference over the rich harvests of reality!

To you, honest fathers, who lengthen out the evening to maintain your families! to you, poor widows, weeping and working by a cradle! to you, young men, resolutely set to open for yourselves a path in life, large enough to lead through it the wife of your choice! to you, all brave soldiers of work and of self-sacrifice!

To you, lastly, whatever your title and your name, who love good, who pity the suffering; who walk through the world like the symbolical Virgin of Byzantium, with both arms open to the human race!

—Here I am suddenly interrupted by loud and increasing chirpings. I look about me: my window is surrounded with sparrows picking up the crumbs of bread which in my brown study I had just scattered on the roof. At this sight a flash of light broke upon my saddened heart. I deceived myself just now, when I complained that I had nothing to give: thanks to me, the sparrows of this part of the town will have their New-Year’s gifts!

*Twelve o’clock.*—A knock at my door; a poor girl comes in, and greets me by name. At first I do not recollect her; but she looks at me, and smiles. Ah! it is Paulette! But it is almost a year since I have seen her, and Paulette is no longer the same: the other day she was a child, now she is almost a young woman.

Paulette is thin, pale, and miserably clad; but she has always the same open and straightforward look—the same mouth, smiling at every word, as if to court your sympathy—the same voice, somewhat timid, yet ex-

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pressing fondness. Paulette is not pretty—she is even thought plain; as for me, I think her charming. Perhaps that is not on her account, but on my own. Paulette appears to me as one of my happiest recollections.

It was the evening of a public holiday. Our principal buildings were illuminated with festoons of fire, a thousand flags waved in the night winds, and the fireworks had just shot forth their spouts of flame into the midst of the Champ de Mars. Suddenly, one of those unaccountable alarms which strike a multitude with panic fell upon the dense crowd: they cry out, they rush on headlong; the weaker ones fall, and the frightened crowd tramples them down in its convulsive struggles. I escaped from the confusion by a miracle, and was hastening away, when the cries of a perishing child arrested me: I reentered that human chaos, and, after unheard-of exertions, I brought Paulette out of it at the peril of my life.

That was two years ago: since then I had not seen the child again but at long intervals, and I had almost forgotten her; but Paulette's memory was that of a grateful heart, and she came at the beginning of the year to offer me her wishes for my happiness. She brought me, besides, a wallflower in full bloom; she herself had planted and reared it: it was something that belonged wholly to herself; for it was by her care, her perseverance, and her patience, that she had obtained it.

The wallflower had grown in a common pot; but Paulette, who is a bandbox-maker, had put it into a case of varnished payer, ornamented with arabesques. These

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might have been in better taste, but I did not feel the attention and good-will the less.

This unexpected present, the little girl’s modest blushes, the compliments she stammered out, dispelled, as by a sunbeam, the kind of mist which had gathered round my mind; my thoughts suddenly changed from the leaden tints of evening to the brightest colors of dawn. I made Paulette sit down, and questioned her with a light heart.

At first the little girl replied in monosyllables; but very soon the tables were turned, and it was I who interrupted with short interjections her long and confidential talk. The poor child leads a hard life. She was left an orphan long since, with a brother and sister, and lives with an old grandmother, who has “brought them up to poverty,” as she always calls it.

However, Paulette now helps her to make band-boxes, her little sister Perrine begins to use the needle, and her brother Henry is apprentice to a printer. All would go well if it were not for losses and want of work—if it were not for clothes which wear out, for appetites which grow larger, and for the winter, when you cannot get sunshine for nothing. Paulette complains that her candles go too quickly, and that her wood costs too much. The fireplace in their garret is so large that a fagot makes no more show in it than a match; it is so near the roof that the wind blows the rain down it, and in winter it hails upon the hearth; so they have left off using it. Henceforth they must be content with an earthen chafing-dish, upon which they cook their meals. The grandmother had often spoken of a stove that was

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for sale at the broker's close by; but he asked seven francs for it, and the times are too hard for such an expense: the family, therefore, resign themselves to cold for economy!

As Paulette spoke, I felt more and more that I was losing my fretfulness and low spirits. The first disclosures of the little bandbox-maker created within me a wish that soon became a plan. I questioned her about her daily occupations, and she informed me that on leaving me she must go, with her brother, her sister, and grandmother, to the different people for whom they work. My plan was immediately settled. I told the child that I would go to see her in the evening, and I sent her away with fresh thanks.

I placed the wallflower in the open window, where a ray of sunshine bid it welcome; the birds were singing around, the sky had cleared up, and the day, which began so loweringly, had become bright. I sang as I moved about my room, and, having hastily put on my hat and coat, I went out.

*Three o'clock.*—All is settled with my neighbor, the chimney-doctor; he will repair my old stove, and answers for its being as good as new. At five o'clock we are to set out, and put it up in Paulette's grandmother's room.

*Midnight.*—All has gone off well. At the hour agreed upon, I was at the old bandbox-maker's; she was still out. My Piedmontese\* fixed the stove, while I arranged a dozen logs in the great fireplace, taken

\* In Paris a chimney-sweeper is named "Piedmontese" or "Savoyard," as they usually come from that country.

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from my winter stock. I shall make up for them by warming myself with walking, or by going to bed earlier.

My heart beat at every step that was heard on the staircase; I trembled lest they should interrupt me in my preparations, and should thus spoil my intended surprise. But no!—see everything ready: the lighted stove murmurs gently, the little lamp burns upon the table, and a bottle of oil for it is provided on the shelf. The chimney-doctor is gone. Now my fear lest they should come is changed into impatience at their not coming. At last I hear children’s voices; here they are: they push open the door and rush in—but they all stop in astonishment.

At the sight of the lamp, the stove, and the visitor, who stands there like a magician in the midst of these wonders, they draw back almost frightened. Paulette is the first to comprehend it, and the arrival of the grandmother, who is more slowly mounting the stairs, finishes the explanation. Then come tears, ecstasies, thanks!

But the wonders are not yet ended. The little sister opens the oven, and discovers some chestnuts just roasted; the grandmother puts her hand on the bottles of cider arranged on the dresser; and I draw forth from the basket that I have hidden a cold tongue, a pot of butter, and some fresh rolls.

Now their wonder turns into admiration; the little family have never seen such a feast! They lay the cloth, they sit down, they eat; it is a complete banquet for all, and each contributes his share to it. I had brought

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only the supper: and the bandbox-maker and her children supplied the enjoyment.

What bursts of laughter at nothing! What a hubbub of questions which waited for no reply, of replies which answered no question! The old woman herself shared in the wild merriment of the little ones! I have always been struck at the ease with which the poor forget their wretchedness. Being used to live only for the present, they make a gain of every pleasure as soon as it offers itself. But the surfeited rich are more difficult to satisfy: they require time and everything to suit before they will consent to be happy.

The evening has passed like a moment. The old woman told me the history of her life, sometimes smiling, sometimes drying her eyes. Perrine sang an old ballad with her fresh young voice. Henry told us what he knows of the great writers of the day, to whom he has to carry their proofs. At last we were obliged to separate, not without fresh thanks on the part of the happy family.

I have come home slowly, ruminating with a full heart, and pure enjoyment, on the simple events of my evening. It has given me much comfort and much instruction. Now, no New-Year's Day will come amiss to me; I know that no one is so unhappy as to have nothing to give and nothing to receive.

As I came in, I met my rich neighbor's new equipage. She, too, had just returned from her evening's party; and, as she sprang from the carriage-step with feverish impatience, I heard her murmur "At last!"

I, when I left Paulette's family, said "So soon!"

## CHAPTER II

### THE CARNIVAL

*February 20th*



HAT a noise out of doors! What is the meaning of these shouts and cries? Ah! I recollect: this is the last day of the Carnival, and the maskers are passing.

Christianity has not been able to abolish the noisy bacchanalian festivals of the pagan times, but it has changed the names. That which it has given to these "days of liberty" announces the ending of the feasts, and the month of fasting which should follow; *carnival* means, literally, "farewell to flesh!" It is a forty days' farewell to the "blessed pullets and fat hams," so celebrated by Pantagruel's minstrel. Man prepares for privation by satiety, and finishes his sin thoroughly before he begins to repent.

Why, in all ages and among every people, do we meet with some one of these mad festivals? Must we believe that it requires such an effort for men to be reasonable, that the weaker ones have need of rest at intervals? The monks of La Trappe, who are condemned to silence by their rule, are allowed to speak once in a month, and on this day they all talk at once from the rising to the setting of the sun.

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Perhaps it is the same in the world. As we are obliged all the year to be decent, orderly, and reasonable, we make up for such a long restraint during the Carnival. It is a door opened to the incongruous fancies and wishes that have hitherto been crowded back into a corner of our brain. For a moment the slaves become the masters, as in the days of the Saturnalia, and all is given up to the “fools of the family.”

The shouts in the square redouble; the troops of masks increase—on foot, in carriages, and on horse-back. It is now who can attract the most attention by making a figure for a few hours, or by exciting curiosity or envy; to-morrow they will all return, dull and exhausted, to the employments and troubles of yesterday.

Alas! thought I with vexation, each of us is like these masqueraders; our whole life is often but an unsightly Carnival! And yet man has need of holidays, to relax his mind, rest his body, and open his heart. Can he not have them, then, with these coarse pleasures? Economists have been long inquiring what is the best disposal of the industry of the human race. Ah! if I could only discover the best disposal of its leisure! It is easy enough to find it work; but who will find it relaxation? Work supplies the daily bread; but it is cheerfulness that gives it a relish. O philosophers! go in quest of pleasure! find us amusements without brutality, enjoyments without selfishness; in a word, invent a Carnival that will please everybody, and bring shame to no one.

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*Three o’clock.*—I have just shut my window, and stirred up my fire. As this is a holiday for everybody, I will make it one for myself, too. So I light the little lamp over which, on grand occasions, I make a cup of the coffee that my portress’s son brought from the Levant, and I look in my bookcase for one of my favorite authors.

First, here is the amusing parson of Meudon; but his characters are too fond of talking slang:—Voltaire; but he disheartens men by always bantering them:—Molière; but he hinders one’s laughter by making one think:—Lesage; let us stop at him. Being profound rather than grave, he preaches virtue while ridiculing vice; if bitterness is sometimes to be found in his writings, it is always in the garb of mirth: he sees the miseries of the world without despising it, and knows its cowardly tricks without hating it.

Let us call up all the heroes of his book. Gil Blas, Fabrice, Sangrado, the Archbishop of Granada, the Duke of Lerma, Aurora, Scipio! Ye gay or graceful figures, rise before my eyes, people my solitude; bring hither for my amusement the world-carnival, of which you are the brilliant maskers!

Unfortunately, at the very moment I made this invocation, I recollect I had a letter to write which could not be put off. One of my attic neighbors came yesterday to ask me to do it. He is a cheerful old man, and has a passion for pictures and prints. He comes home almost every day with a drawing or painting—probably of little value; for I know he lives penuriously, and even the letter that I am to write for him shows his

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poverty. His only son, who was married in England, is just dead, and his widow—left without any means, and with an old mother and a child—had written to beg for a home. M. Antoine asked me first to translate the letter, and then to write a refusal. I had promised that he should have this answer to-day: before everything, let us fulfil our promises.

The sheet of “Bath” paper is before me, I have dipped my pen into the ink, and I rub my forehead to invite forth a sally of ideas, when I perceive that I have not my dictionary. Now, a Parisian who would speak English without a dictionary is like a child without leading-strings; the ground trembles under him, and he stumbles at the first step. I run then to the bookbinder’s, where I left my Johnson, who lives close by in the square.

The door is half open; I hear low groans; I enter without knocking, and I see the bookbinder by the bedside of his fellow-lodger. This latter has a violent fever and delirium. Pierre looks at him perplexed and out of humor. I learn from him that his comrade was not able to get up in the morning, and that since then he has become worse every hour.

I ask whether they have sent for a doctor.

“Oh, yes, indeed!” replied Pierre, roughly; “one must have money in one’s pocket for that, and this fellow has only debts instead of savings.”

“But you,” said I, rather astonished; “are you not his friend?”

“Friend!” interrupted the bookbinder. “Yes, as much as the shaft-horse is friend to the leader—on con-

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dition that each will take his share of the draught, and eat his feed by himself.”

“You do not intend, however, to leave him without any help?”

“Bah! he may keep in his bed till to-morrow, as I’m going to the ball.”

“You mean to leave him alone?”

“Well! must I miss a party of pleasure at Courtville\* because this fellow is lightheaded?” asked Pierre, sharply. “I have promised to meet some friends at old Desnoyer’s. Those who are sick may take their broth; my physic is white wine.”

So saying, he untied a bundle, out of which he took the fancy costume of a waterman, and proceeded to dress himself in it.

In vain I tried to awaken some fellow-feeling for the unfortunate man who lay groaning there, close by him; being entirely taken up with the thoughts of his expected pleasure, Pierre would hardly so much as hear me. At last his coarse selfishness provoked me. I began reproaching instead of remonstrating with him, and I declared him responsible for the consequences which such a desertion must bring upon the sick man.

At this the bookbinder, who was just going, stopped with an oath, and stamped his foot. “Am I to spend my Carnival in heating water for footbaths, pray?”

“You must not leave your comrade to die without help!” I replied.

“Let him go to the hospital, then!”

“How can he by himself?”

\* A Parisian summer resort.

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Pierre seemed to make up his mind.

"Well, I'm going to take him," resumed he; "besides, I shall get rid of him sooner. Come, get up, comrade!" He shook his comrade, who had not taken off his clothes. I observed that he was too weak to walk, but the bookbinder would not listen: he made him get up, and half dragged, half supported him to the lodge of the porter, who ran for a hackney carriage. I saw the sick man get into it, almost fainting, with the impatient waterman; and they both set off, one perhaps to die, the other to dine at Courtville Gardens!

*Six o'clock.*—I have been to knock at my neighbor's door, who opened it himself; and I have given him his letter, finished at last, and directed to his son's widow. M. Antoine thanked me gratefully, and made me sit down.

It was the first time I had been into the attic of the old amateur. Curtains stained with damp and hanging down in rags, a cold stove, a bed of straw, two broken chairs, composed all the furniture. At the end of the room were a great number of prints in a heap, and paintings without frames turned against the wall.

At the moment I came in, the old man was making his dinner on some hard crusts of bread, which he was soaking in a glass of *eau sucrée*. He perceived that my eyes fell upon his hermit fare, and he looked a little ashamed.

"There is nothing to tempt you in my supper, neighbor," said he, with a smile.

I replied that at least I thought it a very philosophical one for the Carnival.

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M. Antoine shook his head, and went on again with his supper.

“Every one keeps his holidays in his own way,” resumed he, beginning again to dip a crust into his glass. “There are several sorts of epicures, and not all feasts are meant to regale the palate; there are some also for the ears and the eyes.”

I looked involuntarily round me, as if to seek for the invisible banquet which could make up to him for such a supper.

Without doubt he understood me; for he got up slowly, and, with the magisterial air of a man confident in what he is about to do, he rummaged behind several picture frames, drew forth a painting, over which he passed his hand, and silently placed it under the light of the lamp.

It represented a fine-looking old man, seated at table with his wife, his daughter, and his children, and singing to the accompaniment of musicians who appeared in the background. At first sight I recognized the subject, which I had often admired at the Louvre, and I declared it to be a splendid copy of Jordaens.

“A copy!” cried M. Antoine; “say an original, neighbor, and an original retouched by Rubens! Look closer at the head of the old man, the dress of the young woman, and the accessories. One can count the pencil-strokes of the Hercules of painters. It is not only a masterpiece, sir; it is a treasure—a relic! The picture at the Louvre may be a pearl, this is a diamond!”

And resting it against the stove, so as to place it in the

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best light, he fell again to soaking his crusts, without taking his eyes off the wonderful picture. One would have said that the sight of it gave the crusts an unexpected relish, for he chewed them slowly, and emptied his glass by little sips. His shrivelled features became smooth, his nostrils expanded; it was indeed, as he said himself, "a feast for the eyes."

"You see that I also have my treat," he resumed, nodding his head with an air of triumph. "Others may run after dinners and balls; as for me, this is the pleasure I give myself for my Carnival."

"But if this painting is really so precious," replied I, "it ought to be worth a high price."

"Eh! eh!" said M. Antoine, with an air of proud indifference. "In good times, a good judge might value it at somewhere about twenty thousand francs."

I started back.

"And you have bought it?" cried I.

"For nothing," replied he, lowering his voice. "These brokers are asses; mine mistook this for a student's copy; he let me have it for fifty louis, ready money! This morning I took them to him, and now he wishes to be off the bargain."

"This morning!" repeated I, involuntarily casting my eyes on the letter containing the refusal that M. Antoine had made me write to his son's widow, which was still on the little table.

He took no notice of my exclamation, and went on contemplating the work of Jordaens in an ecstasy.

"What a knowledge of *chiaroscuro!*!" he murmured, biting his last crust in delight. "What relief! what

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fire! Where can one find such transparency of color! such magical lights! such force! such nature!”

As I was listening to him in silence, he mistook my astonishment for admiration, and clapped me on the shoulder.

“You are dazzled,” said he merrily; “you did not expect such a treasure! What do you say to the bargain I have made?”

“Pardon me,” replied I, gravely; “but I think you might have done better.”

M. Antoine raised his head.

“How!” cried he; “do you take me for a man likely to be deceived about the merit or value of a painting?”

“I neither doubt your taste nor your skill; but I cannot help thinking that, for the price of this picture of a family party, you might have had——”

“What then?”

“The family itself, sir.”

The old amateur cast a look at me, not of anger, but of contempt. In his eyes I had evidently just proved myself a barbarian, incapable of understanding the arts, and unworthy of enjoying them. He got up without answering me, hastily took up the Jordaens, and replaced it in its hiding-place behind the prints.

It was a sort of dismissal; I took leave of him, and went away.

*Seven o’clock.*—When I come in again, I find my water boiling over my lamp, and I busy myself in grinding my Mocha, and setting out my coffee-things.

The getting coffee ready is the most delicate and most

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attractive of domestic operations to one who lives alone: it is the grand work of a bachelor's housekeeping.

Coffee is, so to say, just the mid-point between bodily and spiritual nourishment. It acts agreeably, and at the same time, upon the senses and the thoughts. Its very fragrance gives a sort of delightful activity to the wits; it is a genius that lends wings to our fancy, and transports it to the land of the Arabian Nights.

When I am buried in my old easy-chair, my feet on the fender before a blazing fire, my ear soothed by the singing of the coffee-pot, which seems to gossip with my fire-irons, the sense of smell gently excited by the aroma of the Arabian bean, and my eyes shaded by my cap pulled down over them, it often seems as if each cloud of the fragrant steam took a distinct form. As in the mirages of the desert, in each as it rises, I see some image of which my mind had been longing for the reality.

At first the vapor increases, and its color deepens. I see a cottage on a hillside: behind is a garden shut in by a white-thorn hedge, and through the garden runs a brook, on the banks of which I hear the bees humming.

Then the view opens still more. See those fields planted with apple-trees, in which I can distinguish a plough and horses waiting for their master! Farther on, in a part of the wood which rings with the sound of the axe, I perceive the woodsman's hut, roofed with turf and branches; and, in the midst of all these rural pictures, I seem to see a figure of myself gliding about. It is my ghost walking in my dream!

The bubbling of the water, ready to boil over, com-

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pels me to break off my meditations, in order to fill up the coffee-pot. I then remember that I have no cream; I take my tin can off the hook and go down to the milk-woman’s.

Mother Denis is a hale countrywoman from Savoy, which she left when quite young; and, contrary to the custom of the Savoyards, she has not gone back to it again. She has neither husband nor child, notwithstanding the title they give her; but her kindness, which never sleeps, makes her worthy of the name of mother.

A brave creature! Left by herself in the battle of life, she makes good her humble place in it by working, singing, helping others, and leaving the rest to God.

At the door of the milk-shop I hear loud bursts of laughter. In one of the corners of the shop three children are sitting on the ground. They wear the sooty dress of Savoyard boys, and in their hands they hold large slices of bread and cheese. The youngest is besmeared up to the eyes with his, and that is the reason of their mirth.

Mother Denis points them out to me.

“Look at the little lambs, how they enjoy themselves!” said she, putting her hand on the head of the little glutton.

“He has had no breakfast,” puts in one of the others by way of excuse.

“Poor little thing,” said the milkwoman; “he is left alone in the streets of Paris, where he can find no other father than the All-good God!”

“And that is why you make yourself a mother to them?” I replied, gently.

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“What I do is little enough,” said Mother Denis, measuring out my milk; “but every day I get some of them together out of the street, that for once they may have enough to eat. Dear children! their mothers will make up for it in heaven. Not to mention that they recall my native mountains to me: when they sing and dance, I seem to see our old father again.”

Here her eyes filled with tears.

“So you are repaid by your recollections for the good you do them?” resumed I.

“Yes! yes!” said she, “and by their happiness, too! The laughter of these little ones, sir, is like a bird’s song; it makes you gay, and gives you heart to live.”

As she spoke she cut some fresh slices of bread and cheese, and added some apples and a handful of nuts to them.

“Come, my little dears,” she cried, “put these into your pockets against to-morrow.”

Then, turning to me—

“To-day I am ruining myself,” added she; “but we must all have our Carnival.”

I came away without saying a word: I was too much affected.

At last I have discovered what true pleasure is. After beholding the egotism of sensuality and of intellect, I have found the happy self-sacrifice of goodness. Pierre, M. Antoine, and Mother Denis had all kept their Carnival; but for the first two, it was only a feast for the senses or the mind; while for the third, it was a feast for the heart.

## CHAPTER III

WHAT WE MAY LEARN BY LOOKING OUT OF WINDOW

*March 3d*



POET has said that life is the dream of a shadow: he would better have compared it to a night of fever! What alternate fits of restlessness and sleep! what discomfort! what sudden starts! what ever-returning thirst! what a chaos of mournful and confused fancies! We can neither sleep nor wake; we seek in vain for repose, and we stop short on the brink of action. Two thirds of human existence are wasted in hesitation, and the last third in repenting.

When I say human existence, I mean my own! We are so made that each of us regards himself as the mirror of the community: what passes in our minds infallibly seems to us a history of the universe. Every man is like the drunkard who reports an earthquake, because he feels himself staggering.

And why am I uncertain and restless—I, a poor day-laborer in the world—who fill an obscure station in a corner of it, and whose work it avails itself of, without heeding the workman? I will tell you, my unseen friend, for whom these lines are written; my unknown brother,

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on whom the solitary call in sorrow; my imaginary confidant, to whom all monologues are addressed and who is but the shadow of our own conscience.

A great event has happened in my life! A cross-road has suddenly opened in the middle of the monotonous way along which I was travelling quietly, and without thinking of it. Two roads present themselves, and I must choose between them. One is only the continuation of that I have followed till now; the other is wider, and exhibits wondrous prospects. On the first there is nothing to fear, but also little to hope; on the other are great dangers and great fortune. Briefly, the question is, whether I shall give up the humble office in which I thought to die, for one of those bold speculations in which chance alone is banker! Ever since yesterday I have consulted with myself; I have compared the two and I remain undecided.

Where shall I find light—who will advise me?

*Sunday, 4th.*—See the sun coming out from the thick fogs of winter! Spring announces its approach; a soft breeze skims over the roofs, and my wallflower begins to blow again.

We are near that sweet season of fresh green, of which the poets of the sixteenth century sang with so much feeling:

Now the gladsome month of May  
All things newly doth array;  
Fairest lady, let me too  
In thy love my life renew.

The chirping of the sparrows calls me: they claim the crumbs I scatter to them every morning. I open my

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window, and the prospect of roofs opens out before me in all its splendor.

He who has lived only on a first floor has no idea of the picturesque variety of such a view. He has never contemplated these tile-colored heights which intersect each other; he has not followed with his eyes these gutter-valleys, where the fresh verdure of the attic gardens waves, the deep shadows which evening spreads over the slated slopes, and the sparkling of windows which the setting sun has kindled to a blaze of fire. He has not studied the flora of these Alps of civilization, carpeted by lichens and mosses; he is not acquainted with the myriad inhabitants that people them, from the microscopic insect to the domestic cat—that reynard of the roofs who is always on the prowl, or in ambush; he has not witnessed the thousand aspects of a clear or a cloudy sky; nor the thousand effects of light, that make these upper regions a theatre with ever-changing scenes! How many times have my days of leisure passed away in contemplating this wonderful sight; in discovering its darker or brighter episodes; in seeking, in short, in this unknown world for the impressions of travel that wealthy tourists look for lower!

*Nine o’clock.*—But why, then, have not my winged neighbors picked up the crumbs I have scattered for them before my window? I see them fly away, come back, perch upon the ledges of the windows, and chirp at the sight of the feast they are usually so ready to devour! It is not my presence that frightens them; I have accustomed them to eat out of my hand. Then, why this fearful suspense? In vain I look around: the

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roof is clear, the windows near are closed. I crumble the bread that remains from my breakfast to attract them by an ampler feast. Their chirpings increase, they bend down their heads, the boldest approach upon the wing, but without daring to alight.

Come, come, my sparrows are the victims of one of the foolish panics which make the funds fall at the Bourse! It is plain that birds are not more reasonable than men!

With this reflection I was about to shut my window, when suddenly I perceived, in a spot of sunshine on my right, the shadow of two pricked-up ears; then a paw advanced, then the head of a tabby-cat showed itself at the corner of the gutter. The cunning fellow was lying there in wait, hoping the crumbs would bring him some game.

And I had accused my guests of cowardice! I was so sure that no danger could menace them! I thought I had looked well everywhere! I had only forgotten the corner behind me!

In life, as on the roofs, how many misfortunes come from having forgotten a single corner!

*Ten o'clock.*—I cannot leave my window; the rain and the cold have kept it shut so long that I must reconnoitre all the environs to be able to take possession of them again. My eyes search in succession all the points of the jumbled and confused prospect, passing on or stopping according to what they light upon.

Ah! see the windows upon which they formerly loved to rest; they are those of two unknown neighbors, whose different habits they have long remarked.

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One is a poor workwoman, who rises before sunrise, and whose profile is shadowed upon her little muslin window-curtain far into the evening; the other is a young songstress, whose vocal flourishes sometimes reach my attic by snatches. When their windows are open, that of the workwoman discovers a humble but decent abode; the other, an elegantly furnished room. But to-day a crowd of tradespeople throng the latter: they take down the silk hangings and carry off the furniture, and I now remember that the young singer passed under my window this morning with her veil down, and walking with the hasty step of one who suffers some inward trouble. Ah! I guess it all. Her means are exhausted in elegant fancies, or have been taken away by some unexpected misfortune, and now she has fallen from luxury to indigence. While the workwoman manages not only to keep her little room, but also to furnish it with decent comfort by her steady toil, that of the singer is become the property of brokers. The one sparkled for a moment on the wave of prosperity; the other sails slowly but safely along the coast of a humble and laborious industry.

Alas! is there not here a lesson for us all? Is it really in hazardous experiments, at the end of which we shall meet with wealth or ruin, that the wise man should employ his years of strength and freedom? Ought he to consider life as a regular employment which brings its daily wages, or as a game in which the future is determined by a few throws? Why seek the risk of extreme chances? For what end hasten to riches by dangerous roads? Is it really certain that happiness

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is the prize of brilliant successes, rather than of a wisely accepted poverty? Ah! if men but knew in what a small dwelling joy can live, and how little it costs to furnish it!

*Twelve o'clock.*—I have been walking up and down my attic for a long time, with my arms folded and my eyes on the ground! My doubts increase, like shadows encroaching more and more on some bright space; my fears multiply; and the uncertainty becomes every moment more painful to me! It is necessary for me to decide to-day, and before the evening! I hold the dice of my future fate in my hands, and I dare not throw them.

*Three o'clock.*—The sky has become cloudy, and a cold wind begins to blow from the west; all the windows which were opened to the sunshine of a beautiful day are shut again. Only on the opposite side of the street, the lodger on the last story has not yet left his balcony.

One knows him to be a soldier by his regular walk, his gray moustaches, and the ribbon that decorates his buttonhole. Indeed, one might have guessed as much from the care he takes of the little garden which is the ornament of his balcony in mid-air; for there are two things especially loved by all old soldiers—flowers and children. They have been so long obliged to look upon the earth as a field of battle, and so long cut off from the peaceful pleasures of a quiet lot, that they seem to begin life at an age when others end it. The tastes of their early years, which were arrested by the stern duties of war, suddenly break out again with their white hairs, and are like the savings of youth which they spend again in old age. Besides, they have been condemned to be

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destroyers for so long that perhaps they feel a secret pleasure in creating, and seeing life spring up again: the beauty of weakness has a grace and an attraction the more for those who have been the agents of unbending force; and the watching over the frail germs of life has all the charms of novelty for these old workmen of death.

Therefore the cold wind has not driven my neighbor from his balcony. He is digging up the earth in his green boxes, and carefully sowing the seeds of the scarlet nasturtium, convolvulus, and sweet-pea. Henceforth he will come every day to watch for their first sprouting, to protect the young shoots from weeds or insects, to arrange the strings for the tendrils to climb on, and carefully to regulate their supply of water and heat!

How much labor to bring in the desired harvest! For that, how many times shall I see him brave cold or heat, wind or sun, as he does to-day! But then, in the hot summer days, when the blinding dust whirls in clouds through our streets, when the eye, dazzled by the glare of white stucco, knows not where to rest, and the glowing roofs reflect their heat upon us to burning, the old soldier will sit in his arbor and perceive nothing but green leaves and flowers around him, and the breeze will come cool and fresh to him through these perfumed shades. His assiduous care will be rewarded at last.

We must sow the seeds, and tend the growth, if we would enjoy the flower.

*Four o’clock.*—The clouds that have been gathering in the horizon for a long time are become darker; it

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thunders loudly, and the rain pours down! Those who are caught in it fly in every direction, some laughing and some crying.

I always find particular amusement in these helter-skelters, caused by a sudden storm. It seems as if each one, when thus taken by surprise, loses the factitious character that the world or habit has given him, and appears in his true colors.

See, for example, that big man with deliberate step, who suddenly forgets his indifference, made to order, and runs like a schoolboy! He is a thrifty city gentleman, who, with all his fashionable airs, is afraid to spoil his hat.

That pretty woman yonder, on the contrary, whose looks are so modest, and whose dress is so elaborate, slackens her pace with the increasing storm. She seems to find pleasure in braving it, and does not think of her velvet cloak spotted by the hail! She is evidently a lioness in sheep's clothing.

Here, a young man, who was passing, stops to catch some of the hailstones in his hand, and examines them. By his quick and business-like walk just now, you would have taken him for a tax-gatherer on his rounds, when he is a young philosopher, studying the effects of electricity. And those schoolboys who leave their ranks to run after the sudden gusts of a March whirlwind; those girls, just now so demure, but who now fly with bursts of laughter; those national guards, who quit the martial attitude of their days of duty to take refuge under a porch! The storm has caused all these transformations.

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See, it increases! The hardiest are obliged to seek shelter. I see every one rushing toward the shop in front of my window, which a bill announces is to let. It is for the fourth time within a few months. A year ago all the skill of the joiner and the art of the painter were employed in beautifying it, but their works are already destroyed by the leaving of so many tenants; the cornices of the front are disfigured by mud; the arabesques on the doorway are spoiled by bills posted upon them to announce the sale of the effects. The splendid shop has lost some of its embellishments with each change of the tenant. See it now empty, and left open to the passersby. How much does its fate resemble that of so many who, like it, only change their occupation to hasten the faster to ruin!

I am struck by this last reflection: since the morning everything seems to speak to me, and with the same warning tone. Everything says: “Take care! be content with your happy, though humble lot; happiness can be retained only by constancy; do not forsake your old patrons for the protection of those who are unknown!”

Are they the outward objects which speak thus, or does the warning come from within? Is it not I myself who give this language to all that surrounds me? The world is but an instrument, to which we give sound at will. But what does it signify if it teaches us wisdom? The low voice that speaks in our breasts is always a friendly voice, for it tells us what we are, that is to say, what is our capability. Bad conduct results, for the most part, from mistaking our calling. There are so many fools and knaves, because there are so few men

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who know themselves. The question is not to discover what will suit us, but for what we are suited!

What should I do among these many experienced financial speculators? I am only a poor sparrow, born among the housetops, and should always fear the enemy crouching in the dark corner; I am a prudent workman, and should think of the business of my neighbors who so suddenly disappeared; I am a timid observer, and should call to mind the flowers so slowly raised by the old soldier, or the shop brought to ruin by constant change of masters. Away from me, ye banquets, over which hangs the sword of Damocles! I am a country mouse. Give me my nuts and hollow tree, and I ask nothing besides—except security.

And why this insatiable craving for riches? Does a man drink more when he drinks from a large glass? Whence comes that universal dread of mediocrity, the fruitful mother of peace and liberty? Ah! there is the evil which, above every other, it should be the aim of both public and private education to anticipate! If that were got rid of, what treasons would be spared, what baseness avoided, what a chain of excess and crime would be forever broken! We award the palm to charity, and to self-sacrifice; but, above all, let us award it to moderation, for it is the great social virtue. Even when it does not create the others, it stands instead of them.

*Six o'clock.*—I have written a letter of thanks to the promoters of the new speculation, and have declined their offer! This decision has restored my peace of mind. I stopped singing, like the cobbler, as long as I

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entertained the hope of riches: it is gone, and happiness is come back!

O beloved and gentle Poverty! pardon me for having for a moment wished to fly from thee, as I would from Want. Stay here forever with thy charming sisters, Pity, Patience, Sobriety, and Solitude; be ye my queens and my instructors; teach me the stern duties of life; remove far from my abode the weakness of heart and giddiness of head which follow prosperity. Holy Poverty! teach me to endure without complaining, to impart without grudging, to seek the end of life higher than in pleasure, farther off than in power. Thou givest the body strength, thou makest the mind more firm; and, thanks to thee, this life, to which the rich attach themselves as to a rock, becomes a bark of which death may cut the cable without awakening all our fears. Continue to sustain me, O thou whom Christ hath called Blessed!

## CHAPTER IV

LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER

*April 9th*



HE fine evenings are come back; the trees begin to put forth their shoots; hyacinths, jonquils, violets, and lilacs perfume the baskets of the flower-girls —all the world have begun their walks again on the quays and boulevards. After dinner, I, too, descend from my attic to breathe the evening air.

It is the hour when Paris is seen in all its beauty. During the day the plaster fronts of the houses weary the eye by their monotonous whiteness; heavily laden carts make the streets shake under their huge wheels; the eager crowd, taken up by the one fear of losing a moment from business, cross and jostle one another; the aspect of the city altogether has something harsh, restless, and flurried about it. But, as soon as the stars appear, everything is changed; the glare of the white houses is quenched in the gathering shades; you hear no more any rolling but that of the carriages on their way to some party of pleasure; you see only the lounger or the light-hearted passing by; work has given place to leisure. Now each one may breathe after the fierce race through the business of the day, and whatever

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strength remains to him he gives to pleasure! See the ballrooms lighted up, the theatres open, the eating-shops along the walks set out with dainties, and the twinkling lanterns of the newspaper criers. Decidedly Paris has laid aside the pen, the ruler, and the apron; after the day spent in work, it must have the evening for enjoyment; like the masters of Thebes, it has put off all serious matter till to-morrow.

I love to take part in this happy hour; not to mix in the general gayety, but to contemplate it. If the enjoyments of others embitter jealous minds, they strengthen the humble spirit; they are the beams of sunshine, which open the two beautiful flowers called *trust* and *hope*.

Although alone in the midst of the smiling multitude, I do not feel myself isolated from it, for its gayety is reflected upon me: it is my own kind, my own family, who are enjoying life, and I take a brother's share in their happiness. We are all fellow-soldiers in this earthly battle, and what does it matter on whom the honors of the victory fall? If Fortune passes by without seeing us, and pours her favors on others, let us console ourselves, like the friend of Parmenio, by saying, “Those, too, are Alexanders.”

While making these reflections, I was going on as chance took me. I crossed from one pavement to another, I retraced my steps, I stopped before the shops or to read the handbills. How many things there are to learn in the streets of Paris! What a museum it is! Unknown fruits, foreign arms, furniture of old times or other lands, animals of all climates, statues of great

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men, costumes of distant nations! It is the world seen in samples!

Let us then look at this people, whose knowledge is gained from the shop-windows and the tradesman's display of goods. Nothing has been taught them, but they have a rude notion of everything. They have seen pineapples at Chevet's, a palm-tree in the Jardin des Plantes, sugar-canés selling on the Pont-Neuf. The Redskins, exhibited in the Valentine Hall, have taught them to mimic the dance of the bison, and to smoke the calumet of peace; they have seen Carter's lions fed; they know the principal national costumes contained in Babin's collection; Goupil's display of prints has placed the tiger-hunts of Africa and the sittings of the English Parliament before their eyes; they have become acquainted with Queen Victoria, the Emperor of Austria, and Kossuth, at the office-door of the *Illustrated News*. We can certainly instruct them, but not astonish them; for nothing is completely new to them. You may take the Paris ragamuffin through the five quarters of the world, and at every wonder with which you think to surprise him, he will settle the matter with that favorite and conclusive answer of his class—"I know."

But this variety of exhibitions, which makes Paris the fair of the world, does not offer merely a means of instruction to him who walks through it; it is a continual spur for rousing the imagination, a first step of the ladder always set up before us in a vision. When we see them, how many voyages do we take in imagination, what adventures do we dream of, what pictures do

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we sketch! I never look at that shop near the Chinese baths, with its tapestry hangings of Florida jessamine, and filled with magnolias, without seeing the forest glades of the New World, described by the author of *Atala*, opening themselves out before me.

Then, when this study of things and this discourse of reason begin to tire you, look around you! What contrasts of figures and faces you see in the crowd! What a vast field for the exercise of meditation! A half-seen glance, or a few words caught as the speaker passes by, open a thousand vistas to your imagination. You wish to comprehend what these imperfect disclosures mean, and, as the antiquary endeavors to decipher the mutilated inscription on some old monument, you build up a history on a gesture or on a word! These are the stirring sports of the mind, which finds in fiction a relief from the wearisome dullness of the actual.

Alas! as I was just now passing by the carriage-entrance of a great house, I noticed a sad subject for one of these histories. A man was sitting in the darkest corner, with his head bare, and holding out his hat for the charity of those who passed. His threadbare coat had that look of neatness which marks that destitution has been met by a long struggle. He had carefully buttoned it up to hide the want of a shirt. His face was half hid under his gray hair, and his eyes were closed, as if he wished to escape the sight of his own humiliation, and he remained mute and motionless. Those who passed him took no notice of the beggar, who sat in silence and darkness! They had been so lucky as to

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escape complaints and importunities, and were glad to turn away their eyes too.

Suddenly the great gate turned on its hinges; and a very low carriage, lighted with silver lamps and drawn by two black horses, came slowly out, and took the road toward the Faubourg St. Germain. I could just distinguish, within, the sparkling diamonds and the flowers of a ball-dress; the glare of the lamps passed like a bloody streak over the pale face of the beggar, and showed his look as his eyes opened and followed the rich man's equipage until it disappeared in the night.

I dropped a small piece of money into the hat he was holding out, and passed on quickly.

I had just fallen unexpectedly upon the two saddest secrets of the disease which troubles the age we live in: the envious hatred of him who suffers want, and the selfish forgetfulness of him who lives in affluence.

All the enjoyment of my walk was gone; I left off looking about me, and retired into my own heart. The animated and moving sight in the streets gave place to inward meditation upon all the painful problems which have been written for the last four thousand years at the bottom of each human struggle, but which are propounded more clearly than ever in our days.

I pondered on the uselessness of so many contests, in which defeat and victory only displace each other by turns, and on the mistaken zealots who have repeated from generation to generation the bloody history of Cain and Abel; and, saddened with these mournful reflections, I walked on as chance took me, until the si-

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lence all around insensibly drew me out from my own thoughts.

I had reached one of the remote streets, in which those who would live in comfort and without ostentation, and who love serious reflection, delight to find a home. There were no shops along the dimly lighted street; one heard no sounds but of distant carriages, and of the steps of some of the inhabitants returning quietly home.

I instantly recognized the street, though I had been there only once before.

That was two years ago. I was walking at the time by the side of the Seine, to which the lights on the quays and bridges gave the aspect of a lake surrounded by a garland of stars; and I had reached the Louvre, when I was stopped by a crowd collected near the parapet: they had gathered round a child of about six, who was crying, and I asked the cause of his tears.

“It seems that he was sent to walk in the Tuileries,” said a mason, who was returning from his work with his trowel in his hand; “the servant who took care of him met with some friends there, and told the child to wait for him while he went to get a drink; but I suppose the drink made him more thirsty, for he has not come back, and the child cannot find his way home.”

“Why do they not ask him his name, and where he lives?”

“They have been doing it for the last hour; but all he can say is, that he is called Charles, and that his father is Monsieur Duval—there are twelve hundred Duvals in Paris.”

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“Then he does not know in what part of the town he lives?”

“I should not think, indeed! Don’t you see that he is a gentleman’s child? He has never gone out except in a carriage or with a servant; he does not know what to do by himself.”

Here the mason was interrupted by some of the voices rising above the others.

“We cannot leave him in the street,” said some.

“The child-stealers would carry him off,” continued others.

“We must take him to the overseer.”

“Or to the police-office.”

“That’s the thing. Come, little one!”

But the child, frightened by these suggestions of danger, and at the names of police and overseer, cried louder, and drew back toward the parapet. In vain they tried to persuade him; his fears made him resist the more, and the most eager began to get weary, when the voice of a little boy was heard through the confusion.

“I know him well—I do,” said he, looking at the lost child; “he belongs in our part of the town.”

“What part is it?”

“Yonder, on the other side of the Boulevards—Rue des Magasins.”

“And you have seen him before?”

“Yes, yes! he belongs to the great house at the end of the street, where there is an iron gate with gilt points.”

The child quickly raised his head, and stopped cry-

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ing. The little boy answered all the questions that were put to him, and gave such details as left no room for doubt. The other child understood him, for he went up to him as if to put himself under his protection.

“Then you can take him to his parents?” asked the mason, who had listened with real interest to the little boy’s account.

“I don’t care if I do,” replied he; “it’s the way I’m going.”

“Then you will take charge of him?”

“He has only to come with me.”

And, taking up the basket he had put down on the pavement, he set off toward the postern-gate of the Louvre.

The lost child followed him.

“I hope he will take him right,” said I, when I saw them go away.

“Never fear,” replied the mason; “the little one in the blouse is the same age as the other; but, as the saying is, ‘he knows black from white;’ poverty, you see, is a famous schoolmistress!”

The crowd dispersed. For my part, I went toward the Louvre; the thought came into my head to follow the two children, so as to guard against any mistake.

I was not long in overtaking them; they were walking side by side, talking, and already quite familiar with each other. The contrast in their dress then struck me. Little Duval wore one of those fanciful children’s dresses which are expensive as well as in good taste; his coat was skilfully fitted to his figure, his trousers came down in plaits from his waist to his boots of pol-

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ished leather with mother-of-pearl buttons, and his ringlets were half hid by a velvet cap. The appearance of his guide, on the contrary, was that of the class who dwell on the extreme borders of poverty, but who there maintain their ground with no surrender. His old blouse, patched with pieces of different shades, indicated the perseverance of an industrious mother struggling against the wear and tear of time; his trousers were become too short, and showed his stockings darned over and over again; and it was evident that his shoes were not made for him.

The countenances of the two children were not less different than their dress. That of the first was delicate and refined; his clear blue eye, his fair skin, and his smiling mouth gave him a charming look of innocence and happiness. The features of the other, on the contrary, had something rough in them; his eye was quick and lively, his complexion dark, his smile less merry than shrewd; all showed a mind sharpened by too early experience; he walked boldly through the middle of the streets thronged by carriages, and followed their countless turnings without hesitation.

I found, on asking him, that every day he carried dinner to his father, who was then working on the left bank of the Seine; and this responsible duty had made him careful and prudent. He had learned those hard but forcible lessons of necessity which nothing can equal or supply the place of. Unfortunately, the wants of his poor family had kept him from school, and he seemed to feel the loss; for he often stopped before the printshops, and asked his companion to read him the

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names of the engravings. In this way we reached the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, which the little wanderer seemed to know again. Notwithstanding his fatigue, he hurried on; he was agitated by mixed feelings; at the sight of his house he uttered a cry, and ran toward the iron gate with the gilt points; a lady who was standing at the entrance received him in her arms, and from the exclamations of joy, and the sound of kisses, I soon perceived she was his mother.

Not seeing either the servant or child return, she had sent in search of them in every direction, and was waiting for them in intense anxiety.

I explained to her in a few words what had happened. She thanked me warmly, and looked round for the little boy who had recognized and brought back her son; but while we were talking, he had disappeared.

It was for the first time since then that I had come into this part of Paris. Did the mother continue grateful? Had the children met again, and had the happy chance of their first meeting lowered between them that barrier which may mark the different ranks of men, but should not divide them?

While putting these questions to myself, I slackened my pace, and fixed my eyes on the great gate, which I just perceived. Suddenly I saw it open, and two children appeared at the entrance. Although much grown, I recognized them at first sight; they were the child who was found near the parapet of the Louvre, and his young guide. But the dress of the latter was greatly changed: his blouse of gray cloth was neat, and even spruce, and was fastened round the waist by a polished

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leather belt; he wore strong shoes, but made for his feet, and had on a new cloth cap.

Just at the moment I saw him, he held in his two hands an enormous bunch of lilacs, to which his companion was trying to add narcissuses and primroses; the two children laughed, and parted with a friendly good-by. M. Duval's son did not go in till he had seen the other turn the corner of the street.

Then I accosted the latter, and reminded him of our former meeting; he looked at me for a moment, and then seemed to recollect me.

"Forgive me if I do not make you a bow," said he, merrily, "but I want both my hands for the nosegay Monsieur Charles has given me."

"You are, then, become great friends?" said I.

"Oh! I should think so," said the child; "and now my father is rich too!"

"How's that?"

"Monsieur Duval lent him some money; he has taken a shop, where he works on his own account; and, as for me, I go to school."

"Yes," replied I, remarking for the first time the cross that decorated his little coat; "and I see that you are head-boy!"

"Monsieur Charles helps me to learn, and so I am come to be the first in the class."

"Are you now going to your lessons?"

"Yes, and he has given me some lilacs; for he has a garden where we play together, and where my mother can always have flowers."

"Then it is the same as if it were partly your own."

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“So it is! Ah! they are good neighbors indeed. But here I am; good-by, sir.”

He nodded to me with a smile, and disappeared.

I went on with my walk, still pensive, but with a feeling of relief. If I had elsewhere witnessed the painful contrast between affluence and want, here I had found the true union of riches and poverty. Hearty good-will had smoothed down the more rugged inequalities on both sides, and had opened a road of true neighborhood and fellowship between the humble workshop and the stately mansion. Instead of hearkening to the voice of interest, they had both listened to that of self-sacrifice, and there was no place left for contempt or envy. Thus, instead of the beggar in rags, that I had seen at the other door cursing the rich man, I had found here the happy child of the laborer loaded with flowers and blessing him! The problem, so difficult and so dangerous to examine into with no regard but for the rights of it, I had just seen solved by love.

## CHAPTER V

### COMPENSATION

*Sunday, May 27th*



CAPITAL cities have one thing peculiar to them: their days of rest seem to be the signal for a general dispersion and flight. Like birds that are just restored to liberty, the people come out of their stone cages, and joyfully fly toward the country. It is who shall find a green hillock for a seat, or the shade of a wood for a shelter; they gather May flowers, they run about the fields; the town is forgotten until the evening, when they return with sprigs of blooming hawthorn in their hats, and their hearts gladdened by pleasant thoughts and recollections of the past day; the next day they return again to their harness and to work.

These rural adventures are most remarkable at Paris. When the fine weather comes, clerks, shopkeepers, and workingmen look forward impatiently for the Sunday as the day for trying a few hours of this pastoral life; they walk through six miles of grocers' shops and public-houses in the faubourgs, in the sole hope of finding a real turnip-field. The father of a family begins the practical education of his son by

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showing him wheat which has not taken the form of a loaf, and cabbage “in its wild state.” Heaven only knows the encounters, the discoveries, the adventures that are met with! What Parisian has not had his *Odyssey* in an excursion through the suburbs, and would not be able to write a companion to the famous *Travels by Land and by Sea from Paris to St. Cloud?*

We do not now speak of that floating population from all parts, for whom our French Babylon is the caravansary of Europe: a phalanx of thinkers, artists, men of business, and travellers, who, like Homer’s hero, have arrived in their intellectual country after beholding “many peoples and cities;” but of the settled Parisian, who keeps his appointed place, and lives on his own floor like the oyster on his rock, a curious vestige of the credulity, the slowness, and the simplicity of bygone ages.

For one of the singularities of Paris is, that it unites twenty populations completely different in character and manners. By the side of the gypsies of commerce and of art, who wander through all the several stages of fortune or fancy, live a quiet race of people with an independence, or with regular work, whose existence resembles the dial of a clock, on which the same hand points by turns to the same hours. If no other city can show more brilliant and more stirring forms of life, no other contains more obscure and more tranquil ones. Great cities are like the sea: storms agitate only the surface; if you go to the bottom, you find a region inaccessible to the tumult and the noise.

For my part, I have settled on the verge of this re-

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gion, but do not actually live in it. I am removed from the turmoil of the world, and live in the shelter of solitude, but without being able to disconnect my thoughts from the struggle going on. I follow at a distance all its events of happiness or grief; I join the feasts and the funerals; for how can he who looks on, and knows what passes, do other than take part? Ignorance alone can keep us strangers to the life around us: selfishness itself will not suffice for that.

These reflections I made to myself in my attic, in the intervals of the various household works to which a bachelor is forced when he has no other servant than his own ready will. While I was pursuing my deductions, I had blacked my boots, brushed my coat, and tied my cravat; I had at last arrived at the important moment when we pronounce complacently that all is finished, and that well.

A grand resolve had just decided me to depart from my usual habits. The evening before, I had seen by the advertisements that the next day was a holiday at Sèvres, and that the china manufactory would be open to the public. I was tempted by the beauty of the morning, and suddenly decided to go there.

On my arrival at the station on the left bank, I noticed the crowd hurrying on in the fear of being late. Railroads, besides many other advantages, possess that of teaching the French punctuality. They will submit to the clock when they are convinced that it is their master; they will learn to wait when they find they will not be waited for. Social virtues, are, in a great degree, good habits. How many great qualities

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are grafted into nations by their geographical position, by political necessity, and by institutions! Avarice was destroyed for a time among the Lacedæmonians by the creation of an iron coinage, too heavy and too bulky to be conveniently hoarded.

I found myself in a carriage with two middle-aged women belonging to the domestic and retired class of Parisians I have spoken of above. A few civilities were sufficient to gain me their confidence, and after some minutes I was acquainted with their whole history.

They were two poor sisters, left orphans at fifteen, and had lived ever since, as those who work for their livelihood must live, by economy and privation. For the last twenty or thirty years they had worked in jewelry in the same house; they had seen ten masters succeed one another, and make their fortunes in it, without any change in their own lot. They had always lived in the same room, at the end of one of the passages in the Rue St. Denis, where the air and the sun are unknown. They began their work before daylight, went on with it till after nightfall, and saw year succeed to year without their lives being marked by any other events than the Sunday service, a walk, or an illness.

The younger of these worthy workwomen was forty, and obeyed her sister as she did when a child. The elder looked after her, took care of her, and scolded her with a mother’s tenderness. At first it was amusing; afterward one could not help seeing something affecting in these two gray-haired children, one unable to leave off the habit of obeying, the other that of protecting.

And it was not in that alone that my two companions

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seemed younger than their years; they knew so little that their wonder never ceased. We had hardly arrived at Clamart before they involuntarily exclaimed, like the king in the children's game, that they "did not think the world was so great"!

It was the first time they had trusted themselves on a railroad, and it was amusing to see their sudden shocks, their alarms, and their courageous determinations: everything was a marvel to them! They had remains of youth within them, which made them sensible to things which usually only strike us in childhood. Poor creatures! they had still the feelings of another age, though they had lost its charms.

But was there not something holy in this simplicity, which had been preserved to them by abstinence from all the joys of life? Ah! accursed be he who first had the bad courage to attach ridicule to that name of "old maid," which recalls so many images of grievous deception, of dreariness, and of abandonment! Accursed be he who can find a subject for sarcasm in involuntary misfortune, and who can crown gray hairs with thorns!

The two sisters were called Frances and Madeleine. This day's journey was a feat of courage without example in their lives. The fever of the times had infected them unawares. Yesterday Madeleine had suddenly proposed the idea of the expedition, and Frances had accepted it immediately. Perhaps it would have been better not to yield to the great temptation offered by her younger sister; but "we have our follies at all ages," as the prudent Frances philosophically remarked. As

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for Madeleine, there are no regrets or doubts for her; she is the life-guardsman of the establishment.

“We really must amuse ourselves,” said she; “we live but once.”

And the elder sister smiled at this Epicurean maxim. It was evident that the fever of independence was at its crisis in both of them.

And in truth it would have been a great pity if any scruple had interfered with their happiness, it was so frank and genial! The sight of the trees, which seemed to fly on both sides of the road, caused them unceasing admiration. The meeting a train passing in the contrary direction, with the noise and rapidity of a thunderbolt, made them shut their eyes and utter a cry; but it had already disappeared! They look around, take courage again, and express themselves full of astonishment at the marvel.

Madeleine declares that such a sight is worth the expense of the journey, and Frances would have agreed with her if she had not recollectcd, with some little alarm, the deficit which such an expense must make in their budget. The three francs spent upon this single expedition were the savings of a whole week of work. Thus the joy of the elder of the two sisters was mixed with remorse; the prodigal child now and then turned its eyes toward the back street of St. Denis.

But the motion and the succession of objects distract her. See the bridge of the Val surrounded by its lovely landscape: on the right, Paris with its grand monuments, which rise through the fog, or sparkle in the sun; on the left, Meudon, with its villas, its woods, its vines,

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and its royal castle! The two workwomen look from one window to the other with exclamations of delight. One fellow-passenger laughs at their childish wonder; but to me it is deeply touching, for I see in it the sign of a long and monotonous seclusion: they are the prisoners of work, who have recovered liberty and fresh air for a few hours.

At last the train stops, and we get out. I show the two sisters the path that leads to Sèvres, between the railway and the gardens, and they go on before, while I inquire about the time of returning.

I soon join them again at the next station, where they have stopped at the little garden belonging to the gate-keeper; both are already in deep conversation with him while he digs his garden-borders, and marks out the places for flower-seeds. He informs them that it is the time for hoeing out weeds, for making grafts and layers, for sowing annuals, and for destroying the insects on the rose-trees. Madeleine has on the sill of her window two wooden boxes, in which, for want of air and sun, she has never been able to make anything grow but mustard and cress; but she persuades herself that, thanks to this information, all other plants may henceforth thrive in them. At last the gate-keeper, who is sowing a border with mignonette, gives her the rest of the seeds which he does not want, and the old maid goes off delighted, and begins to act over again the dream of Perrette and her can of milk, with these flowers of her imagination.

On reaching the grove of acacias, where the fair was going on, I lost sight of the two sisters. I went alone

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among the sights: there were lotteries going on, mountebank shows, places for eating and drinking, and for shooting with the cross-bow. I have always been struck by the spirit of these out-of-door festivities. In drawing-room entertainments, people are cold, grave, often listless, and most of those who go there are brought together by habit or the obligations of society; in the country assemblies, on the contrary, you only find those who are attracted by the hope of enjoyment. There, it is a forced conscription; here, they are volunteers for gayety! Then, how easily they are pleased! How far this crowd of people is yet from knowing that to be pleased with nothing, and to look down on everything, is the height of fashion and good taste! Doubtless their amusements are often coarse; elegance and refinement are wanting in them; but at least they have heartiness. Oh, that the hearty enjoyments of these merry-makings could be retained in union with less vulgar feeling! Formerly religion stamped its holy character on the celebration of country festivals, and purified the pleasures without depriving them of their simplicity.

The hour arrives at which the doors of the porcelain manufactory and the museum of pottery are open to the public. I meet Frances and Madeleine again in the first room. Frightened at finding themselves in the midst of such regal magnificence, they hardly dare walk; they speak in a low tone, as if they were in a church.

“We are in the king’s house,” said the eldest sister, forgetting that there is no longer a king in France.

I encourage them to go on; I walk first, and they make up their minds to follow me.

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What wonders are brought together in this collection! Here we see clay moulded into every shape, tinted with every color, and combined with every sort of substance!

Earth and wood are the first substances worked upon by man, and seem more particularly meant for his use. They, like the domestic animals, are the essential accessories of his life; therefore there must be a more intimate connection between them and us. Stone and metals require long preparations; they resist our first efforts, and belong less to the individual than to communities. Earth and wood are, on the contrary, the principal instruments of the isolated being who must feed and shelter himself.

This, doubtless, makes me feel so much interested in the collection I am examining. These cups, so roughly modelled by the savage, admit me to a knowledge of some of his habits; these elegant yet incorrectly formed vases of the Indian tell me of a declining intelligence, in which still glimmers the twilight of what was once bright sunshine; these jars, loaded with arabesques, show the fancy of the Arab rudely and ignorantly copied by the Spaniard! We find here the stamp of every race, every country, and every age.

My companions seemed little interested in these historical associations; they looked at all with that credulous admiration which leaves no room for examination or discussion. Madeleine read the name written under every piece of workmanship, and her sister answered with an exclamation of wonder.

In this way we reached a little courtyard, where they had thrown away the fragments of some broken china.

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Frances perceived a colored saucer almost whole, of which she took possession as a record of the visit she was making; henceforth she would have a specimen of the Sèvres china, “which is only made for kings!” I would not undeceive her by telling her that the products of the manufactory are sold all over the world, and that her saucer, before it was cracked, was the same as those that are bought at the shops for sixpence! Why should I destroy the illusions of her humble existence? Are we to break down the hedge-flowers that perfume our paths? Things are oftenest nothing in themselves; the thoughts we attach to them alone give them value. To rectify innocent mistakes, in order to recover some useless reality, is to be like those learned men who will see nothing in a plant but the chemical elements of which it is composed.

On leaving the manufactory, the two sisters, who had taken possession of me with the freedom of artlessness, invited me to share the luncheon they had brought with them. I declined at first, but they insisted with so much good-nature, that I feared to pain them, and with some awkwardness gave way.

We had only to look for a convenient spot. I led them up the hill, and we found a plot of grass enamelled with daisies, and shaded by two walnut-trees.

Madeleine could not contain herself for joy. All her life she had dreamed of a dinner out on the grass! While helping her sister to take the provisions from the basket, she tells me of all her expeditions into the country that had been planned, and put off. Frances, on the other hand, was brought up at Montmorency, and

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before she became an orphan she had often gone back to her nurse's house. That which had the attraction of novelty for her sister, had for her the charm of recollection. She told of the vintage harvests to which her parents had taken her; the rides on Mother Luret's donkey, that they could not make go to the right without pulling him to the left; the cherry-gathering; and the sails on the lake in the innkeeper's boat.

These recollections have all the charm and freshness of childhood. Frances recalls to herself less what she has seen than what she has felt. While she is talking the cloth is laid, and we sit down under a tree. Before us winds the valley of Sèvres, its many-storied houses abutting upon the gardens and the slopes of the hill; on the other side spreads out the park of St. Cloud, with its magnificent clumps of trees interspersed with meadows; above stretch the heavens like an immense ocean, in which the clouds are sailing! I look at this beautiful country, and I listen to these good old maids; I admire, and I am interested; and time passes gently on without my perceiving it.

At last the sun sets, and we have to think of returning. While Madeleine and Frances clear away the dinner, I walk down to the manufactory to ask the hour. The merrymaking is at its height; the blasts of the trombones resound from the band under the acacias. For a few moments I forget myself with looking about; but I have promised the two sisters to take them back to the Bellevue station; the train cannot wait, and I make haste to climb the path again which leads to the walnut-trees.

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Just before I reached them, I heard voices on the other side of the hedge. Madeleine and Frances were speaking to a poor girl whose clothes were burned, her hands blackened, and her face tied up with blood-stained bandages. I saw that she was one of the girls employed at the gunpowder mills, which are built further up on the common. An explosion had taken place a few days before; the girl’s mother and elder sister were killed; she herself escaped by a miracle, and was now left without any means of support. She told all this with the resigned and unhopeful manner of one who has always been accustomed to suffer. The two sisters were much affected; I saw them consulting with each other in a low tone: then Frances took thirty sous out of a little coarse silk purse, which was all they had left, and gave them to the poor girl. I hastened on to that side of the hedge; but, before I reached it, I met the two old sisters, who called out to me that they would not return by the railway, but on foot!

I then understood that the money they had meant for the journey had just been given to the beggar! Good, like evil, is contagious: I run to the poor wounded girl, give her the sum that was to pay for my own place, and return to Frances and Madeleine, and tell them I will walk with them.

. . . . .

I am just come back from taking them home; and have left them delighted with their day, the recollection of which will long make them happy.

This morning I was pitying those whose lives are

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obscure and joyless; now, I understand that God has provided a compensation with every trial. The smallest pleasure derives from rarity a relish otherwise unknown. Enjoyment is only what we feel to be such, and the luxurious man feels no longer: satiety has destroyed his appetite, while privation preserves to the other that first of earthly blessings: the being easily made happy. Oh, that I could persuade every one of this! that so the rich might not abuse their riches, and that the poor might have patience. If happiness is the rarest of blessings, it is because the reception of it is the rarest of virtues.

Madeleine and Frances! ye poor old maids whose courage, resignation, and generous hearts are your only wealth, pray for the wretched who give themselves up to despair; for the unhappy who hate and envy; and for the unfeeling into whose enjoyments no pity enters.

## CHAPTER VI

UNCLE MAURICE

*June 7th, Four O'clock A.M.*



AM not surprised at hearing, when I awake, the birds singing so joyfully outside my window; it is only by living, as they and I do, in a top story, that one comes to know how cheerful the mornings really are up among the roofs. It is there that the sun sends his first rays, and the breeze comes with the fragrance of the gardens and woods; there that a wandering butterfly sometimes ventures among the flowers of the attic, and that the songs of the industrious workwoman welcome the dawn of day. The lower stories are still deep in sleep, silence, and shadow, while here labor, light, and song already reign.

What life is around me! See the swallow returning from her search for food, with her beak full of insects for her young ones; the sparrows shake the dew from their wings while they chase one another in the sunshine; and my neighbors throw open their windows, and welcome the morning with their fresh faces! Delightful hour of waking, when everything returns to feeling and to motion; when the first light of day strikes upon creation, and brings it to life again, as the magic

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wand struck the palace of the Sleeping Beauty in the wood! It is a moment of rest from every misery; the sufferings of the sick are allayed, and a breath of hope enters into the hearts of the despairing. But, alas! it is but a short respite! Everything will soon resume its wonted course: the great human machine, with its long strains, its deep gasps, its collisions, and its crashes, will be again put in motion.

The tranquillity of this first morning hour reminds me of that of our first years of life. Then, too, the sun shines brightly, the air is fragrant, and the illusions of youth—those birds of our life's morning—sing around us. Why do they fly away when we are older? Where do this sadness and this solitude, which gradually steal upon us, come from? The course seems to be the same with individuals and with communities: at starting, so readily made happy, so easily enchanted; and at the goal, the bitter disappointment or reality! The road, which began among hawthorns and primroses, ends speedily in deserts or in precipices! Why is there so much confidence at first, so much doubt at last? Has, then, the knowledge of life no other end but to make it unfit for happiness? Must we condemn ourselves to ignorance if we would preserve hope? Is the world and is the individual man intended, after all, to find rest only in an eternal childhood?

How many times have I asked myself these questions! Solitude has the advantage or the danger of making us continually search more deeply into the same ideas. As our discourse is only with ourself, we always give the same direction to the conversation; we

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are not called to turn it to the subject which occupies another mind, or interests another’s feelings; and so an involuntary inclination makes us return forever to knock at the same doors!

I interrupted my reflections to put my attic in order. I hate the look of disorder, because it shows either a contempt for details or an unaptness for spiritual life. To arrange the things among which we have to live, is to establish the relation of property and of use between them and us: it is to lay the foundation of those habits without which man tends to the savage state. What, in fact, is social organization but a series of habits, settled in accordance with the dispositions of our nature?

I distrust both the intellect and the morality of those people to whom disorder is of no consequence—who can live at ease in an Augean stable. What surrounds us, reflects more or less that which is within us. The mind is like one of those dark lanterns which, in spite of everything, still throw some light around. If our tastes did not reveal our character, they would be no longer tastes, but instincts.

While I was arranging everything in my attic, my eyes rested on the little almanac hanging over my chimney-piece. I looked for the day of the month, and I saw these words written in large letters: “FÉTE DIEU!”

It is to-day! In this great city, where there are no longer any public religious solemnities, there is nothing to remind us of it; but it is, in truth, the period so happily chosen by the primitive church. “The day kept in honor of the Creator,” says Chateaubriand,

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“happens at a time when the heaven and the earth declare His power, when the woods and fields are full of new life, and all are united by the happiest ties; there is not a single widowed plant in the fields.”

What recollections these words have just awakened! I left off what I was about, I leaned my elbows on the window-sill, and, with my head between my two hands, I went back in thought to the little town where the first days of my childhood were passed.

The *Fête Dieu* was then one of the great events of my life! It was necessary to be diligent and obedient a long time beforehand, to deserve to share in it. I still recollect with what raptures of expectation I got up on the morning of the day. There was a holy joy in the air. The neighbors, up earlier than usual, hung cloths with flowers or figures, worked in tapestry, along the streets. I went from one to another, by turns admiring religious scenes of the Middle Ages, mythological compositions of the Renaissance, old battles in the style of Louis XIV, and the Arcadias of Madame de Pompadour. All this world of phantoms seemed to be coming forth from the dust of past ages, to assist—silent and motionless—at the holy ceremony. I looked, alternately in fear and wonder, at those terrible warriors with their swords always raised, those beautiful huntresses shooting the arrow which never left the bow, and those shepherds in satin breeches always playing the flute at the feet of the perpetually smiling shepherdess. Sometimes, when the wind blew behind these hanging pictures, it seemed to me that the figures themselves moved, and I watched to see them detach themselves from the wall, and take

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their places in the procession! But these impressions were vague and transitory. The feeling that predominated over every other was that of an overflowing yet quiet joy. In the midst of all the floating draperies, the scattered flowers, the voices of the maidens, and the gladness which, like a perfume, exhaled from everything, you felt transported in spite of yourself. The joyful sounds of the festival were repeated in your heart, in a thousand melodious echoes. You were more indulgent, more holy, more loving! For God was not only manifesting himself without, but also within us.

And then the altars for the occasion! the flowery arbors! the triumphal arches made of green boughs! What competition among the different parishes for the erection of the resting-places\* where the procession was to halt! It was who should contribute the rarest and the most beautiful of his possessions!

It was there I made my first sacrifice!

The wreaths of flowers were arranged, the candles lighted, and the Tabernacle† dressed with roses; but one was wanting fit to crown the whole! All the neighboring gardens had been ransacked. I alone possessed a flower worthy of such a place. It was on the rose-tree given me by my mother on my birthday. I had watched it for several months, and there was no other bud to blow on the tree. There it was, half open, in its mossy nest, the object of such long expectations, and of all a child’s pride! I hesitated for some moments. No one

\* The *reposoirs*, or temporary altars, on which the consecrated elements are placed while the procession halts.

† An ornamental case or cabinet, which contains the bread and wine.

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had asked me for it; I might easily avoid losing it. I should hear no reproaches, but one rose noiselessly within me. When every one else had given all they had, ought I alone to keep back my treasure? Ought I to grudge to God one of the gifts which, like all the rest, I had received from him? At this last thought I plucked the flower from the stem, and took it to put at the top of the Tabernacle. Ah! why does the recollection of this sacrifice, which was so hard and yet so sweet to me, now make me smile? Is it so certain that the value of a gift is in itself, rather than in the intention? If the cup of cold water in the gospel is remembered to the poor man, why should not the flower be remembered to the child? Let us not look down upon the child's simple act of generosity; it is these which accustom the soul to self-denial and to sympathy. I cherished this moss-rose a long time as a sacred talisman; I had reason to cherish it always, as the record of the first victory won over myself.

It is now many years since I witnessed the celebration of the *Fête Dieu*; but should I again feel in it the happy sensations of former days? I still remember how, when the procession had passed, I walked through the streets strewed with flowers and shaded with green boughs. I felt intoxicated by the lingering perfumes of the incense, mixed with the fragrance of syringas, jessamine, and roses, and I seemed no longer to touch the ground as I went along. I smiled at everything; the whole world was Paradise in my eyes, and it seemed to me that God was floating in the air!

Moreover, this feeling was not the excitement of the

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moment: it might be more intense on certain days, but at the same time it continued through the ordinary course of my life. Many years thus passed for me in an expansion of heart, and a trustfulness which prevented sorrow, if not from coming, at least from staying with me. Sure of not being alone, I soon took heart again, like the child who recovers its courage, because it hears *its* mother’s voice close by. Why have I lost that confidence of my childhood? Shall I never feel again so deeply that God is here?

How strange the association of our thoughts! A day of the month recalls my infancy, and see, all the recollections of my former years are growing up around me! Why was I so happy then? I consider well, and nothing is sensibly changed in my condition. I possess, as I did then, health and my daily bread; the only difference is, that I am now responsible for myself! As a child, I accepted life when it came; another cared and provided for me. So long as I fulfilled my present duties I was at peace within, and I left the future to the prudence of my father! My destiny was a ship, in the directing of which I had no share, and in which I sailed as a common passenger. There was the whole secret of childhood’s happy security. Since then worldly wisdom has deprived me of it. When my lot was intrusted to my own and sole keeping, I thought to make myself master of it by means of a long insight into the future. I have filled the present hour with anxieties, by occupying my thoughts with the future; I have put my judgment in the place of Providence, and the happy child is changed into the anxious man.

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A melancholy course, yet perhaps an important lesson. Who knows that, if I had trusted more to Him who rules the world, I should not have been spared all this anxiety? It may be that happiness is not possible here below, except on condition of living like a child, giving ourselves up to the duties of each day as it comes, and trusting in the goodness of our heavenly Father for all besides.

This reminds me of my Uncle Maurice! Whenever I have need to strengthen myself in all that is good, I turn my thoughts to him; I see again the gentle expression of his half-smiling, half-mournful face; I hear his voice, always soft and soothing as a breath of summer! The remembrance of him protects my life, and gives it light. He, too, was a saint and martyr here below. Others have pointed out the path of heaven; he has taught us to see those of earth aright.

But, except the angels, who are charged with noting down the sacrifices performed in secret, and the virtues which are never known, who has ever heard of my Uncle Maurice? Perhaps I alone remember his name, and still recall his history.

Well! I will write it, not for others, but for myself! They say that, at the sight of the Apollo, the body erects itself and assumes a more dignified attitude: in the same way, the soul should feel itself raised and ennobled by the recollection of a good man's life!

A ray of the rising sun lights up the little table on which I write; the breeze brings me in the scent of the mignonette, and the swallows wheel about my window with joyful twitterings. The image of my Uncle Mau-

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rice will be in its proper place amid the songs, the sunshine, and the fragrance.

*Seven o’clock.*—It is with men’s lives as with days: some dawn radiant with a thousand colors, others dark with gloomy clouds. That of my Uncle Maurice was one of the latter. He was so sickly, when he came into the world, that they thought he must die; but notwithstanding these anticipations, which might be called hopes, he continued to live, suffering and deformed.

He was deprived of all joys as well as of all the attractions of childhood. He was oppressed because he was weak, and laughed at for his deformity. In vain the little hunchback opened his arms to the world: the world scoffed at him, and went its way.

However, he still had his mother, and it was to her that the child directed all the feelings of a heart repelled by others. With her he found shelter, and was happy, till he reached the age when a man must take his place in life; and Maurice had to content himself with that which others had refused with contempt. His education would have qualified him for any course of life; and he became an octroi-clerk\* in one of the little toll-houses at the entrance of his native town.

He was always shut up in this dwelling of a few feet square, with no relaxation from the office accounts but reading and his mother’s visits. On fine summer days she came to work at the door of his hut, under the shade of a clematis planted by Maurice. And, even when she was silent, her presence was a pleasant change for the

\*The *octroi* is the tax on provisions levied at the entrance of the town.

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hunchback; he heard the clinking of her long knitting-needles; he saw her mild and mournful profile, which reminded him of so many courageously-borne trials; he could every now and then rest his hand affectionately on that bowed neck, and exchange a smile with her!

This comfort was soon to be taken from him. His old mother fell sick, and at the end of a few days he had to give up all hope. Maurice was overcome at the idea of a separation which would henceforth leave him alone on earth, and abandoned himself to boundless grief. He knelt by the bedside of the dying woman, he called her by the fondest names, he pressed her in his arms, as if he could so keep her in life. His mother tried to return his caresses, and to answer him; but her hands were cold, her voice was already gone. She could only press her lips against the forehead of her son, heave a sigh, and close her eyes forever!

They tried to take Maurice away, but he resisted them and threw himself on that now motionless form.

“Dead!” cried he; “dead! She who had never left me, she who was the only one in the world who loved me! You, my mother, dead! What then remains for me here below?”

A stifled voice replied:

“God!”

Maurice, startled, raised himself! Was that a last sigh from the dead, or his own conscience, that had answered him? He did not seek to know, but he understood the answer, and accepted it.

It was then that I first knew him. I often went to see him in his little toll-house. He joined in my child-

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ish games, told me his finest stories, and let me gather his flowers. Deprived as he was of all external attractiveness, he showed himself full of kindness to all who came to him, and, though he never would put himself forward, he had a welcome for everyone. Deserted, despised, he submitted to everything with a gentle patience; and while he was thus stretched on the cross of life, amid the insults of his executioners, he repeated with Christ, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

No other clerk showed so much honesty, zeal, and intelligence; but those who otherwise might have promoted him as his services deserved were repelled by his deformity. As he had no patrons, he found his claims were always disregarded. They preferred before him those who were better able to make themselves agreeable, and seemed to be granting him a favor when letting him keep the humble office which enabled him to live. Uncle Maurice bore injustice as he had borne contempt; unfairly treated by men, he raised his eyes higher, and trusted in the justice of Him who cannot be deceived.

He lived in an old house in the suburb, where many work-people, as poor but not as forlorn as he, also lodged. Among these neighbors there was a single woman, who lived by herself in a little garret, into which came both wind and rain. She was a young girl, pale, silent, and with nothing to recommend her but her wretchedness and her resignation to it. She was never seen speaking to any other woman, and no song cheered her garret. She worked without interest and without relaxation;

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a depressing gloom seemed to envelop her like a shroud. Her dejection affected Maurice; he attempted to speak to her; she replied mildly, but in few words. It was easy to see that she preferred her silence and her solitude to the little hunchback's good-will; he perceived it, and said no more.

But Toinette's needle was hardly sufficient for her support, and presently work failed her! Maurice learned that the poor girl was in want of everything, and that the tradesmen refused to give her credit. He immediately went to them privately and engaged to pay them for what they supplied Toinette with.

Things went on in this way for several months. The young dressmaker continued out of work, until she was at last frightened at the bills she had contracted with the shopkeepers. When she came to an explanation with them, everything was discovered. Her first impulse was to run to Uncle Maurice, and thank him on her knees. Her habitual reserve had given way to a burst of deepest feeling. It seemed as if gratitude had melted all the ice of that numbed heart.

Being now no longer embarrassed with a secret, the little hunchback could give greater efficacy to his good offices. Toinette became to him a sister, for whose wants he had a right to provide. It was the first time since the death of his mother that he had been able to share his life with another. The young woman received his attentions with feeling, but with reserve. All Maurice's efforts were insufficient to dispel her gloom: she seemed touched by his kindness, and sometimes expressed her sense of it with warmth; but there she

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stopped. Her heart was a closed book, which the little hunchback might bend over, but could not read. In truth he cared little to do so; he gave himself up to the happiness of being no longer alone, and took Toinette such as her long trials had made her; he loved her as she was, and wished for nothing else but still to enjoy her company.

This thought insensibly took possession of his mind, to the exclusion of all besides. The poor girl was as forlorn as himself; she had become accustomed to the deformity of the hunchback, and she seemed to look on him with an affectionate sympathy! What more could he wish for? Until then, the hopes of making himself acceptable to a helpmate had been repelled by Maurice as a dream; but chance seemed willing to make it a reality. After much hesitation he took courage, and decided to speak to her.

It was evening; the little hunchback, in much agitation, directed his steps toward the workwoman’s garret. Just as he was about to enter, he thought he heard a strange voice pronouncing the maiden’s name. He quickly pushed open the door, and perceived Toinette weeping, and leaning on the shoulder of a young man in the dress of a sailor.

At the sight of my uncle, she disengaged herself quickly, and ran to him, crying out:

“Ah! come in—come in! It is he that I thought was dead: it is Julien; it is my betrothed!”

Maurice tottered, and drew back. A single word had told him all!

It seemed to him as if the ground shook and his

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heart was about to break; but the same voice that he had heard by his mother's deathbed again sounded in his ears, and he soon recovered himself. God was still his friend!

He himself accompanied the newly-married pair on the road when they left the town, and, after wishing them all the happiness which was denied to him, he returned with resignation to the old house in the suburb.

It was there that he ended his life, forsaken by men, but not as he said by the *Father which is in heaven*. He felt His presence everywhere; it was to him in the place of all else. When he died, it was with a smile, and like an exile setting out for his own country. He who had consoled him in poverty and ill-health, when he was suffering from injustice and forsaken by all, had made death a gain and blessing to him.

*Eight o'clock.*—All I have just written has pained me! Till now I have looked into life for instruction how to live. Is it then true that human maxims are not always sufficient? that beyond goodness, prudence, moderation, humility, self-sacrifice itself, there is one great truth, which alone can face great misfortunes? and that, if man has need of virtues for others, he has need of religion for himself?

When, in youth, we drink our wine with a merry heart, as the Scripture expresses it, we think we are sufficient for ourselves; strong, happy, and beloved, we believe, like Ajax, we shall be able to escape every storm in spite of the gods. But later in life, when the back is bowed, when happiness proves a fading flower, and the affections grow chill—then, in fear of the void

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and the darkness, we stretch out our arms, like the child overtaken by night, and we call for help to Him who is everywhere.

I was asking this morning why this growing confusion alike for society and for the individual? In vain does human reason from hour to hour light some new torch on the roadside: the night continues to grow ever darker! Is it not because we are content to withdraw farther and farther from God, the Sun of spirits?

But what do these hermit's reveries signify to the world? The inward turmoils of most men are stifled by the outward ones; life does not give them time to question themselves. Have they time to know what they are, and what they should be, whose whole thoughts are in the next lease or the last price of stock? Heaven is very high, and wise men look only at the earth.

But I—poor savage amid all this civilization, who seek neither power nor riches, and who have found in my own thoughts the home and shelter of my spirit—I can go back with impunity to these recollections of my childhood; and, if this our great city no longer honors the name of God with a festival, I will strive still to keep the feast to Him in my heart.

## CHAPTER VII

THE PRICE OF POWER AND THE WORTH OF FAME

*Sunday, July 1st*



ESTERDAY the month dedicated to Juno (*Junius*, June) by the Romans ended. To-day we enter on July.

In ancient Rome this latter month was called *Quintilis* (the fifth), because the year, which was then divided into only ten parts, began in March. When Numa Pompilius divided it into twelve months this name of *Quintilis* was preserved, as well as those that followed—*Sextilis*, *September*, *October*, *November*, *December*—although these designations did not accord with the newly arranged order of the months. At last, after a time the month *Quintilis*, in which Julius Cæsar was born, was called *Julius*, whence we have July. Thus this name, placed in the calendar, is become the imperishable record of a great man; it is an immortal epitaph on Time's highway, engraved by the admiration of man.

How many similar inscriptions are there! Seas, continents, mountains, stars, and monuments, have all in succession served the same purpose! We have turned the whole world into a Golden Book, like that in which the state of Venice used to enroll its illustrious

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names and its great deeds. It seems that mankind feels a necessity for honoring itself in its elect ones, and that it raises itself in its own eyes by choosing heroes from among its own race. The human family love to preserve the memory of the *parvenus* of glory, as we cherish that of a great ancestor, or of a benefactor.

In fact, the talents granted to a single individual do not benefit himself alone, but are gifts to the world; everyone shares them, for everyone suffers or benefits by his actions. Genius is a lighthouse, meant to give light from afar; the man who bears it is but the rock upon which this lighthouse is built.

I love to dwell upon these thoughts; they explain to me in what consists our admiration for glory. When glory has benefited men, that admiration is gratitude; when it is only remarkable in itself, it is the pride of race; as men, we love to immortalize the most shining examples of humanity.

Who knows whether we do not obey the same instinct in submitting to the hand of power? Apart from the requirements of a gradation of ranks, or the consequences of a conquest, the multitude delight to surround their chiefs with privileges—whether it be that their vanity makes them thus to aggrandize one of their own creations, or whether they try to conceal the humiliation of subjection by exaggerating the importance of those who rule them. They wish to honor themselves through their master; they elevate him on their shoulders as on a pedestal; they surround him with a halo of light, in order that some of it may be

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reflected upon themselves. It is still the fable of the dog who contents himself with the chain and collar, so that they are of gold.

This servile vanity is not less natural or less common than the vanity of dominion. Whoever feels himself incapable of command, at least desires to obey a powerful chief. Serfs have been known to consider themselves dishonored when they became the property of a mere count after having been that of a prince, and Saint-Simon mentions a valet who would only wait upon marquises.

*July 7th, seven o'clock P. M.*—I have just now been up the Boulevards; it was the opera night, and there was a crowd of carriages in the Rue Lepelletier. The foot-passengers who were stopped at a crossing recognized the persons in some of these as we went by, and mentioned their names; they were those of celebrated or powerful men, the successful ones of the day.

Near me there was a man looking on with hollow cheeks and eager eyes, whose thin black coat was threadbare. He followed with envious looks these possessors of the privileges of power or of fame, and I read on his lips, which curled with a bitter smile, all that passed in his mind.

“Look at them, the lucky fellows!” thought he; “all the pleasures of wealth, all the enjoyments of pride, are theirs. Their names are renowned, all their wishes fulfilled; they are the sovereigns of the world, either by their intellect or their power; and while I, poor and unknown, toil painfully along the road below, they wing

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their way over the mountain-tops gilded by the broad sunshine of prosperity.”

I have come home in deep thought. Is it true that there are these inequalities, I do not say in the fortunes, but in the happiness of men? Do genius and authority really wear life as a crown, while the greater part of mankind receive it as a yoke? Is the difference of rank but a different use of men’s dispositions and talents, or a real inequality in their destinies? A solemn question, as it regards the verification of God’s impartiality.

*July 8th, noon.*—I went this morning to call upon a friend from the same province as myself, who is the first usher-in-waiting to one of our ministers. I took him some letters from his family, left for him by a traveller just come from Brittany. He wished me to stay.

“To-day,” said he, “the Minister gives no audience: he takes a day of rest with his family. His younger sisters are arrived; he will take them this morning to St. Cloud, and in the evening he has invited his friends to a private ball. I shall be dismissed directly for the rest of the day. We can dine together; read the news while you are waiting for me.”

I sat down at a table covered with newspapers, all of which I looked over by turns. Most of them contained severe criticisms on the last political acts of the minister; some of them added suspicions as to the honor of the minister himself.

Just as I had finished reading, a secretary came for them to take them to his master.

He was then about to read these accusations, to suffer silently the abuse of all those tongues which were

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holding him up to indignation or to scorn! Like the Roman victor in his triumph, he had to endure the insults of him who followed his car, relating to the crowd his follies, his ignorance, or his vices.

But, among the arrows shot at him from every side, would no one be found poisoned? Would not one reach some spot in his heart where the wound would be incurable? What is the worth of a life exposed to the attacks of envious hatred or furious conviction? The Christians yielded only the fragments of their flesh to the beasts of the amphitheatres; the man in power gives up his peace, his affections, his honor, to the cruel bites of the pen.

While I was musing upon these dangers of greatness, the usher entered hastily. Important news had been received: the minister is just summoned to the council; he will not be able to take his sisters to St. Cloud.

I saw, through the windows, the young ladies, who were waiting at the door, sorrowfully go upstairs again, while their brother went off to the council. The carriage, which should have gone filled with so much family happiness, is just out of sight, carrying only the cares of a statesman in it.

The usher came back discontented and disappointed. The more or less of liberty which he is allowed to enjoy is his barometer of the political atmosphere. If he gets leave, all goes well; if he is kept at his post, the country is in danger. His opinion on public affairs is but a calculation of his own interest. My friend is almost a statesman.

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I had some conversation with him, and he told me several curious particulars of public life.

The new minister has old friends whose opinions he opposes, though he still retains his personal regard for them. Though separated from them by the colors he fights under, they remain united by old associations; but the exigencies of party forbid him to meet them. If their intercourse continued, it would awaken suspicion; people would imagine that some dishonorable bargain was going on; his friends would be held to be traitors desirous to sell themselves, and he the corrupt minister prepared to buy them. He has, therefore, been obliged to break off friendships of twenty years' standing, and to sacrifice attachments which had become a second nature.

Sometimes, however, the minister still gives way to his old feelings; he receives or visits his friends privately; he shuts himself up with them, and talks of the times when they could be open friends. By dint of precautions they have hitherto succeeded in concealing this blot of friendship against policy; but sooner or later the newspapers will be informed of it, and will denounce him to the country as an object of distrust.

For whether hatred be honest or dishonest, it never shrinks from any accusation. Sometimes it even proceeds to crime. The usher assured me that several warnings had been given the minister which had made him fear the vengeance of an assassin, and that he no longer ventured out on foot.

Then, from one thing to another, I learned what temptations came in to mislead or overcome his judg-

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ment; how he found himself fatally led into obliquities which he could not but deplore. Misled by passion, overpersuaded by entreaties, or compelled for reputation's sake, he has many times held the balance with an unsteady hand. How sad the condition of him who is in authority! Not only are the miseries of power imposed upon him, but its vices also, which, not content with torturing, succeed in corrupting him.

We prolonged our conversation till it was interrupted by the minister's return. He threw himself out of the carriage with a handful of papers, and with an anxious manner went into his own room. An instant afterward his bell was heard; his secretary was called to send off notices to all those invited for the evening; the ball would not take place; they spoke mysteriously of bad news transmitted by the telegraph, and in such circumstances an entertainment would seem to insult the public sorrow.

I took leave of my friend, and here I am at home. What I have just seen is an answer to my doubts the other day. Now I know with what pangs men pay for their dignities; now I understand

That Fortune sells what we believe she gives.

This explains to me the reason why Charles V aspired to the repose of the cloister.

And yet I have only glanced at some of the sufferings attached to power. What shall I say of the falls in which its possessors are precipitated from the heights of heaven to the very depths of the earth? of that path of pain along which they must forever bear the burden of their responsibility? of that chain of decorums and

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*ennuis* which encompasses every act of their lives, and leaves them so little liberty?

The partisans of despotism adhere with reason to forms and ceremonies. If men wish to give unlimited power to their fellow-man, they must keep him separated from ordinary humanity; they must surround him with a continual worship, and, by a constant ceremonial, keep up for him the superhuman part they have granted him. Our masters cannot remain absolute, except on condition of being treated as idols.

But, after all, these idols are men, and, if the exclusive life they must lead is an insult to the dignity of others, it is also a torment to themselves. Everyone knows the law of the Spanish court, which used to regulate, hour by hour, the actions of the king and queen; “so that,” says Voltaire, “by reading it one can tell all that the sovereigns of Spain have done, or will do, from Philip II to the day of judgment.” It was by this law that Philip III, when sick, was obliged to endure such an excess of heat that he died in consequence, because the Duke of Uzeda, who alone had the right to put out the fire in the royal chamber, happened to be absent.

When the wife of Charles II was run away with on a spirited horse, she was about to perish before anyone dared to save her, because etiquette forbade them to touch the queen. Two young officers endangered their lives for her by stopping the horse. The prayers and tears of her whom they had just snatched from death were necessary to obtain pardon for their crime. Every one knows the anecdote related by Madame Campan of Marie Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI. One day, be-

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ing at her toilet, when the chemise was about to be presented to her by one of the assistants, a lady of very ancient family entered and claimed the honor, as she had the right by etiquette; but, at the moment she was about to fulfil her duty, a lady of higher rank appeared, and in her turn took the garment she was about to offer to the queen; when a third lady of still higher title came in her turn, and was followed by a fourth, who was no other than the king's sister. The chemise was in this manner passed from hand to hand, with ceremonies, courtesies, and compliments, before it came to the queen, who, half naked and quite ashamed, was shivering with cold for the great honor of etiquette.

*12th, seven o'clock, P. M.*—On coming home this evening, I saw, standing at the door of a house, an old man, whose appearance and features reminded me of my father. There was the same beautiful smile, the same deep and penetrating eye, the same noble bearing of the head, and the same careless attitude.

I began living over again the first years of my life, and recalling to myself the conversations of that guide whom God in his mercy had given me, and whom in his severity he had too soon withdrawn.

When my father spoke, it was not only to bring our two minds together by an interchange of thought, but his words always contained instruction.

Not that he endeavored to make me feel it so: my father feared everything that had the appearance of a lesson. He used to say that virtue could make herself devoted friends, but she did not take pupils: therefore he was not desirous to teach goodness; he contented

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himself with sowing the seeds of it, certain that experience would make them grow.

How often has good grain fallen thus into a corner of the heart, and, when it has been long forgotten, all at once put forth the blade and come into ear! It is a treasure laid aside in a time of ignorance, and we do not know its value till we find ourselves in need of it.

Among the stories with which he enlivened our walks or our evenings, there is one which now returns to my memory, doubtless because the time is come to derive its lesson from it.

My father, who was apprenticed at the age of twelve to one of those trading collectors who call themselves naturalists, because they put all creation under glasses that they may sell it by retail, had always led a life of poverty and labor. Obliged to rise before daybreak, by turns shopboy, clerk, and laborer, he was made to bear alone all the work of a trade of which his master reaped all the profits. In truth, this latter had a peculiar talent for making the most of the labor of other people. Though unfit himself for the execution of any kind of work, no one knew better how to sell it. His words were a net, in which people found themselves taken before they were aware. And since he was devoted to himself alone, and looked on the producer as his enemy, and the buyer as prey, he used them both with that obstinate perseverance which avarice teaches.

My father was a slave all the week, and could call himself his own only on Sunday. The master naturalist, who used to spend the day at the house of an old female relative, then gave him his liberty on condition

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that he dined out, and at his own expense. But my father used secretly to take with him a crust of bread, which he hid in his botanizing-box, and, leaving Paris as soon as it was day, he would wander far into the valley of Montmorency, the wood of Meudon, or among the windings of the Marne. Excited by the fresh air, the penetrating perfume of the growing vegetation, or the fragrance of the honeysuckles, he would walk on until hunger or fatigue made itself felt. Then he would sit under a hedge, or by the side of a stream, and would make a rustic feast, by turns on watercresses, wood strawberries, and blackberries picked from the hedges; he would gather a few plants, read a few pages of Florian, then in greatest vogue, of Gessner, who was just translated, or of Jean Jacques, of whom he possessed three old volumes. The day was thus passed alternately in activity and rest, in pursuit and meditation, until the declining sun warned him to take again the road to Paris, where he would arrive, his feet torn and dusty, but his mind invigorated for a whole week.

One day, as he was going toward the wood of Viroflay, he met, close to it, a stranger who was occupied in botanizing and in sorting the plants he had just gathered. He was an elderly man with an honest face; but his eyes, which were rather deep-set under his eyebrows, had a somewhat uneasy and timid expression. He was dressed in a brown cloth coat, a gray waistcoat, black breeches, and worsted stockings, and held an ivory-headed cane under his arm. His appearance was that of a small retired tradesman who was living on his means, and rather below the golden mean of Horace.

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My father, who had great respect for age, civilly raised his hat to him as he passed. In doing so, a plant he held fell from his hand; the stranger stooped to take it up, and recognized it.

“It is a *Deutaria heptaphyllos*,” said he; “I have not yet seen any of them in these woods; did you find it near here, sir?”

My father replied that it was to be found in abundance on the top of the hill, toward Sèvres, as well as the great *Laserpitium*.

“That, too!” repeated the old man more briskly. “Ah! I shall go and look for them; I have gathered them formerly on the hillside of Robaila.”

My father proposed to take him. The stranger accepted his proposal with thanks, and hastened to collect together the plants he had gathered; but all of a sudden he appeared seized with a scruple. He observed to his companion that the road he was going was half-way up the hill, and led in the direction of the castle of the Dames Royales at Bellevue; that by going to the top he would consequently turn out of his road, and that it was not right he should take this trouble for a stranger.

My father insisted upon it with his habitual good-nature; but, the more eagerness he showed, the more obstinately the old man refused; it even seemed to my father that his good intention at last excited his suspicion. He therefore contented himself with pointing out the road to the stranger, whom he saluted, and he soon lost sight of him.

Many hours passed by, and he thought no more of

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the meeting. He had reached the copses of Chaville, where, stretched on the ground in a mossy glade, he read once more the last volume of *Emile*. The delight of reading it had so completely absorbed him that he had ceased to see or hear anything around him. With his cheeks flushed and his eyes moist, he repeated aloud a passage which had particularly affected him.

An exclamation uttered close by him awoke him from his ecstasy; he raised his head, and perceived the tradesman-looking person he had met before on the crossroad at Viroflay.

He was loaded with plants, the collection of which seemed to have put him into high good-humor.

"A thousand thanks, sir," said he to my father. "I have found all that you told me of, and I am indebted to you for a charming walk."

My father respectfully rose, and made a civil reply. The stranger had grown quite familiar, and even asked if his young "brother botanist" did not think of returning to Paris. My father replied in the affirmative, and opened his tin box to put his book back in it.

The stranger asked him with a smile if he might without impertinence ask the name of it. My father answered that it was Rousseau's *Emile*.

The stranger immediately became grave.

They walked for some time side by side, my father expressing, with the warmth of a heart still throbbing with emotion, all that this work had made him feel; his companion remaining cold and silent. The former extolled the glory of the great Genevese writer, whose genius had made him a citizen of the world; he expa-

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tiated on this privilege of great thinkers, who reign in spite of time and space, and gather together a people of willing subjects out of all nations; but the stranger suddenly interrupted him:

“And how do you know,” said he, mildly, “whether Jean Jacques would not exchange the reputation which you seem to envy for the life of one of the woodcutters whose chimneys’ smoke we see? What has fame brought him except persecution? The unknown friends whom his books may have made for him content themselves with blessing him in their hearts, while the declared enemies that they have drawn upon him pursue him with violence and calumny! His pride has been flattered by success: how many times has it been wounded by satire? And be assured that human pride is like the Sybarite who was prevented from sleeping by a crease in a roseleaf. The activity of a vigorous mind, by which the world profits, almost always turns against him who possesses it. He expects more from it as he grows older; the ideal he pursues continually disgusts him with the actual; he is like a man who, with a too-refined sight, discerns spots and blemishes in the most beautiful face. I will not speak of stronger temptations and of deeper downfalls. Genius, you have said, is a kingdom; but what virtuous man is not afraid of being a king? He who feels only his great powers, is—with the weaknesses and passions of our nature—preparing for great failures. Believe me, sir, the unhappy man who wrote this book is no object of admiration or of envy; but, if you have a feeling heart, pity him!”

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My father, astonished at the excitement with which his companion pronounced these last words, did not know what to answer.

Just then they reached the paved road which led from Meudon Castle to that of Versailles; a carriage was passing.

The ladies who were in it perceived the old man, uttered an exclamation of surprise, and leaning out of the window repeated:

“There is Jean Jacques—there is Rousseau!”

Then the carriage disappeared in the distance.

My father remained motionless, confounded, and amazed, his eyes wide open, and his hands clasped.

Rousseau, who had shuddered on hearing his name spoken, turned toward him:

“You see,” said he, with the bitter misanthropy which his later misfortunes had produced in him, “Jean Jacques cannot even hide himself: he is an object of curiosity to some, of malignity to others, and to all he is a public thing, at which they point the finger. It would signify less if he had only to submit to the impertinence of the idle; but, as soon as a man has had the misfortune to make himself a name, he becomes public property. Every one rakes into his life, relates his most trivial actions, and insults his feelings; he becomes like those walls, which every passer-by may deface with some abusive writing. Perhaps you will say that I have myself encouraged this curiosity by publishing my *Confessions*. But the world forced me to it. They looked into my house through the blinds, and they slandered me; I have opened the doors and win-

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dows, so that they should at least know me such as I am. Adieu, sir. Whenever you wish to know the worth of fame, remember that you have seen Rousseau.”

*Nine o’clock.*—Ah! now I understand my father’s story! It contains the answer to one of the questions I asked myself a week ago. Yes, I now feel that fame and power are gifts that are dearly bought; and that, when they dazzle the soul, both are oftenest, as Madame de Staël says, but *un deuil éclatant de bonheur!*\*

\* ’Tis better to be lowly born,  
And range with humble livers in content,  
Than to be perk’d up in a glistering grief,  
And wear a golden sorrow.

*Henry VIII., Act II., Scene 3.]*

## CHAPTER VIII

### MISANTHROPY AND REPENTANCE

*August 3d, Nine O'clock P.M.*



HERE are days when everything appears gloomy to us; the world, like the sky, is covered by a dark fog. Nothing seems in its place; we see only misery, improvidence, and cruelty; the world seems without God, and given up to all the evils of chance.

Yesterday I was in this unhappy humor. After a long walk in the faubourgs, I returned home, sad and dispirited.

Everything I had seen seemed to accuse the civilization of which we are so proud! I had wandered into a little by-street, with which I was not acquainted, and I found myself suddenly in the middle of those dreadful abodes where the poor are born, to languish and die. I looked at those decaying walls, which time has covered with a foul leprosy; those windows, from which dirty rags hang out to dry; those fetid gutters, which coil along the fronts of the houses like venomous reptiles! I felt oppressed with grief, and hastened on.

A little farther on I was stopped by the hearse of a hospital; a dead man, nailed down in his deal coffin, was going to his last abode, without funeral pomp or

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ceremony, and without followers. There was not here even that last friend of the outcast—the dog, which a painter has introduced as the sole attendant at the pauper’s burial! He whom they were preparing to commit to the earth was going to the tomb, as he had lived, alone; doubtless no one would be aware of his end. In this battle of society, what signifies a soldier the less?

But what, then, is this human society, if one of its members can thus disappear like a leaf carried away by the wind?

The hospital was near a barrack, at the entrance of which old men, women, and children were quarrelling for the remains of the coarse bread which the soldiers had given them in charity! Thus, beings like ourselves daily wait in destitution on our compassion till we give them leave to live! Whole troops of outcasts, in addition to the trials imposed on all God’s children, have to endure the pangs of cold, hunger, and humiliation. Unhappy human commonwealth! Where man is in a worse condition than the bee in its hive, or the ant in its subterranean city!

Ah! what then avails our reason? What is the use of so many high faculties, if we are neither the wiser nor the happier for them? Which of us would not exchange his life of labor and trouble with that of the birds of the air, to whom the whole world is a life of joy?

How well I understand the complaint of Mao, in the popular tales of the *Foyer Breton* who, when dying of hunger and thirst, says, as he looks at the bullfinches rifling the fruit-trees:

“Alas! those birds are happier than Christians; they

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have no need of inns, or butchers, or bakers, or gardeners. God's heaven belongs to them, and earth spreads a continual feast before them! The tiny flies are their game, ripe grass their cornfields, and hips and haws their store of fruit. They have the right of taking everywhere, without paying or asking leave: thus comes it that the little birds are happy, and sing all the live-long day!"

But the life of man in a natural state is like that of the birds; he equally enjoys nature. "The earth spreads a continual feast before him." What, then, has he gained by that selfish and imperfect association which forms a nation? Would it not be better for every one to turn again to the fertile bosom of nature, and live there upon her bounty in peace and liberty?

*August 10th, four o'clock A.M.*—The dawn casts a red glow on my bedcurtains; the breeze brings in the fragrance of the gardens below. Here I am again leaning on my elbows by the windows, inhaling the freshness and gladness of this first wakening of the day.

My eye always passes over the roofs filled with flowers, warbling, and sunlight, with the same pleasure; but to-day it stops at the end of a buttress which separates our house from the next. The storms have stripped the top of its plaster covering, and dust carried by the wind has collected in the crevices, and, being fixed there by the rain, has formed a sort of aerial terrace, where some green grass has sprung up. Among it rises a stalk of wheat, which to-day is surmounted by a sickly ear that droops its yellow head.

This poor stray crop on the roofs, the harvest of which

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will fall to the neighboring sparrows, has carried my thoughts to the rich crops which are now falling beneath the sickle; it has recalled to me the beautiful walks I took as a child through my native province, when the threshing-floors at the farmhouses resounded from every part with the sound of a flail, and when the carts, loaded with golden sheaves, came in by all the roads. I still remember the songs of the maidens, the cheerfulness of the old men, the open-hearted merriment of the laborers. There was, at that time, something in their looks both of pride and feeling. The latter came from thankfulness to God, the former from the sight of the harvest, the reward of their labor. They felt indistinctly the grandeur and the holiness of their part in the general work of the world; they looked with pride upon their mountains of corn-sheaves, and they seemed to say, Next to God, it is we who feed the world!

What a wonderful order there is in all human labor! While the husbandman furrows his land, and prepares for every one his daily bread, the town artizan, far away, weaves the stuff in which he is to be clothed; the miner seeks underground the iron for his plow; the soldier defends him against the invader; the judge takes care that the law protects his fields; the tax-comptroller adjusts his private interests with those of the public; the merchant occupies himself in exchanging his products with those of distant countries; the men of science and of art add every day a few horses to this ideal team, which draws along the material world, as steam impels the gigantic trains of our iron roads! Thus all unite together, all help one another; the toil of each one benefits

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himself and all the world; the work has been apportioned among the different members of the whole of society by a tacit agreement. If, in this apportionment, errors are committed, if certain individuals have not been employed according to their capacities, those defects of detail diminish in the sublime conception of the whole. The poorest man included in this association has his place, his work, his reason for being there; each is something in the whole.

There is nothing like this for man in the state of nature. As he depends only upon himself, it is necessary that he be sufficient for everything. All creation is his property; but he finds in it as many hindrances as helps. He must surmount these obstacles with the single strength that God has given him; he cannot reckon on any other aid than chance and opportunity. No one reaps, manufactures, fights, or thinks for him; he is nothing to any one. He is a unit multiplied by the cipher of his own single powers; while the civilized man is a unit multiplied by the whole of society.

But, notwithstanding this, the other day, disgusted by the sight of some vices in detail, I cursed the latter, and almost envied the life of the savage.

One of the infirmities of our nature is always to mistake feeling for evidence, and to judge of the season by a cloud or a ray of sunshine.

Was the misery, the sight of which made me regret a savage life, really the effect of civilization? Must we accuse society of having created these evils, or acknowledge, on the contrary, that it has alleviated them? Could the women and children, who were receiving the

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coarse bread from the soldier, hope in the desert for more help or pity? That dead man, whose forsaken state I deplored, had he not found, by the cares of a hospital, a coffin and the humble grave where he was about to rest? Alone, and far from men, he would have died like the wild beast in his den, and would now be serving as food for vultures! These benefits of human society are shared, then, by the most destitute. Whoever eats the bread that another has reaped and kneaded, is under an obligation to his brother, and cannot say he owes him nothing in return. The poorest of us has received from society much more than his own single strength would have permitted him to wrest from nature.

But cannot society give us more? Who doubts it? Errors have been committed in this distribution of tasks and workers. Time will diminish the number of them; with new lights a better division will arise; the elements of society go on toward perfection, like everything else. The difficulty is to know how to adapt ourselves to the slow step of time, whose progress can never be forced on without danger.

*August 14th, six o’clock A.M.*—My garret window rises upon the roof like a massive watch-tower. The corners are covered by large sheets of lead, which run into the tiles; the successive action of cold and heat has made them rise, and so a crevice has been formed in an angle on the right side. There a sparrow has built her nest.

I have followed the progress of this aerial habitation from the first day. I have seen the bird successively

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bring the straw, moss, and wool designed for the construction of her abode; and I have admired the persevering skill she expended in this difficult work. At first, my new neighbor spent her days in fluttering over the poplar in the garden, and in chirping along the gutters; a fine lady's life seemed the only one to suit her. Then all of a sudden, the necessity of preparing a shelter for her brood transformed our idler into a worker; she no longer gave herself either rest or relaxation. I saw her always either flying, fetching, or carrying; neither rain nor sun stopped her. A striking example of the power of necessity! We are indebted to it not only for most of our talents, but for many of our virtues!

Is it not necessity that has given the people of less favored climates that constant activity which has placed them so quickly at the head of nations? As they are deprived of most of the gifts of nature, they have supplied them by their industry; necessity has sharpened their understanding, endurance awakened their foresight. While elsewhere man, warmed by an ever brilliant sun, and loaded with the bounties of the earth, was remaining poor, ignorant, and naked, in the midst of gifts he did not attempt to explore, here he was forced by necessity to wrest his food from the ground, to build habitations to defend himself from the intemperance of the weather, and to warm his body by clothing himself with the wool of animals. Work makes him both more intelligent and more robust: disciplined by it, he seems to mount higher on the ladder of creation, while those more favored by nature remain on the step nearest to the brutes.

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I made these reflections while looking at the bird, whose instinct seemed to have become more acute since she had been occupied in work. At last the nest was finished; she set up her household there, and I followed her through all the phases of her new existence.

When she had sat on the eggs, and the young ones were hatched, she fed them with the most attentive care. The corner of my window had become a stage of moral action, which fathers and mothers might come to take lessons from. The little ones soon became large, and this morning I have seen them take their first flight. One of them, weaker than the others, was not able to clear the edge of the roof, and fell into the gutter. I caught him with some difficulty, and placed him again on the tile in front of his house, but the mother has not noticed him. Once freed from the cares of a family, she has resumed her wandering life among the trees and along the roofs. In vain I have kept away from my window, to take from her every excuse for fear; in vain the feeble little bird has called to her with plaintive cries; his bad mother has passed by, singing and fluttering with a thousand airs and graces. Once only the father came near; he looked at his offspring with contempt, and then disappeared, never to return!

I crumbled some bread before the little orphan, but he did not know how to peck it with his bill. I tried to catch him, but he escaped into the forsaken nest. What will become of him there, if his mother does not come back!

*August 15th, six o’clock.*—This morning, on opening my window, I found the little bird dying upon the tiles;

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his wounds showed me that he had been driven from the nest by his unworthy mother. I tried in vain to warm him again with my breath; I felt the last pulsations of life; his eyes were already closed, and his wings hung down! I placed him on the roof in a ray of sunshine, and I closed my window. The struggle of life against death has always something gloomy in it: it is a warning to us.

Happily I hear some one in the passage; without doubt it is my old neighbor; his conversation will distract my thoughts.

. . . . .

It was my portress. Excellent woman! She wished me to read a letter from her son the sailor, and begged me to answer it for her.

I kept it, to copy it in my journal. Here it is:

“DEAR MOTHER: This is to tell you that I have been very well ever since the last time, except that last week I was nearly drowned with the boat, which would have been a great loss, as there is not a better craft anywhere.

“A gust of wind capsized us; and just as I came up above water, I saw the captain sinking. I went after him, as was my duty, and, after diving three times, I brought him to the surface, which pleased him much; for when we were hoisted on board, and he had recovered his senses, he threw his arms round my neck, as he would have done to an officer.

“I do not hide from you, dear mother, that this has

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delighted me. But it isn’t all; it seems that fishing up the captain has reminded them that I had a good character, and they have just told me that I am promoted to be a sailor of the first class! Directly I knew it, I cried out, ‘My mother shall have coffee twice a day!’ And really, dear mother, there is nothing now to hinder you, as I shall now have a larger allowance to send you.

“I include by begging you to take care of yourself if you wish to do me good; for nothing makes me feel so well as to think that you want for nothing.

“Your son, from the bottom of my heart,  
“JACQUES.”

This is the answer that the portress dictated to me:

“**MY GOOD JACQUOT:** It makes me very happy to see that your heart is still as true as ever, and that you will never shame those who have brought you up. I need not tell you to take care of your life, because you know it is the same as my own, and that without you, dear child, I should wish for nothing but the grave; but we are not bound to live, while we are bound to do our duty.

“Do not fear for my health, good Jacques; I was never better! I do not grow old at all, for fear of making you unhappy. I want nothing, and I live like a lady. I even had some money over this year, and as my drawers shut very badly, I put it into the savings’ bank, where I have opened an account in your name. So, when you come back, you will find yourself with an income. I have also furnished your chest with new linen, and I have knitted you three new sea-jackets.

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“All your friends are well. Your cousin is just dead, leaving his widow in difficulties. I gave her your thirty francs’ remittance, and said that you had sent it her; and the poor woman remembers you day and night in her prayers. So, you see, I have put that money in another sort of savings’ bank; but there it is our hearts that get the interest.

“Good-bye, dear Jacquot. Write to me often, and always remember the good God, and your old mother,

“PHROSINE MILLOT.”

Good son, and worthy mother! how such examples bring us back to a love for the human race! In a fit of fanciful misanthropy, we may envy the fate of the savage, and prefer that of the bird to such as he; but impartial observation soon does justice to such paradoxes. We find, on examination, that in the mixed good and evil of human nature, the good so far abounds that we are not in the habit of noticing it, while the evil strikes us precisely on account of its being the exception. If nothing is perfect, nothing is so bad as to be without its compensation or its remedy. What spiritual riches are there in the midst of the evils of society! how much does the moral world redeem the material!

That which will ever distinguish man from the rest of creation, is his power of deliberate affection and of enduring self-sacrifice. The mother who took care of her brood in the corner of my window devoted to them the necessary time for accomplishing the laws which insure the preservation of her kind; but she obeyed an instinct, and not a rational choice. When she had

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accomplished the mission appointed her by Providence, she cast off the duty as we get rid of a burden, and she returned again to her selfish liberty. The other mother, on the contrary, will go on with her task as long as God shall leave her here below: the life of her son will still remain, so to speak, joined to her own; and when she disappears from the earth, she will leave there that part of herself.

Thus, the affections make for our species an existence separate from all the rest of creation. Thanks to them, we enjoy a sort of terrestrial immortality; and if other beings succeed one another, man alone perpetuates himself.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FAMILY OF MICHAEL AROUT

*September 15th, Eight O'clock*



HIS morning, while I was arranging my books, Mother Geneviève came in, and brought me the basket of fruit I buy of her every Sunday. For the nearly twenty years that I have lived in this quarter, I have dealt in her little fruit-shop. Perhaps I should be better served elsewhere, but Mother Geneviève has but little custom; to leave her would do her harm, and cause her unnecessary pain. It seems to me that the length of our acquaintance has made me incur a sort of tacit obligation to her; my patronage has become her property.

She has put the basket upon my table, and as I want her husband, who is a joiner, to add some shelves to my bookcase, she has gone downstairs again immediately to send him to me.

At first I did not notice either her looks or the sound of her voice: but, now that I recall them, it seems to me that she was not as jovial as usual. Can Mother Geneviève be in trouble about anything?

Poor woman! All her best years were subject to such bitter trials, that she might think she had received her

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full share already. Were I to live a hundred years, I should never forget the circumstances which made her known to me, and which obtained for her my respect.

It was at the time of my first settling in the faubourg. I had noticed her empty fruit-shop, which nobody came into, and, being attracted by its forsaken appearance, I made my little purchases in it. I have always instinctively preferred the poor shops; there is less choice in them, but it seems to me that my purchase is a sign of sympathy with a brother in poverty. These little dealings are almost always an anchor of hope to those whose very existence is in peril—the only means by which some orphan gains a livelihood. There the aim of the tradesman is not to enrich himself, but to live! The purchase you make of him is more than an exchange—it is a good action.

Mother Geneviève at that time was still young, but had already lost that fresh bloom of youth which suffering causes to wither so soon among the poor. Her husband, a clever joiner, gradually left off working to become, according to the picturesque expression of the workshops, *a worshipper of Saint Monday*. The wages of the week, which was always reduced to two or three working days, were completely dedicated by him to the worship of this god of the Barriers,\* and Geneviève was obliged herself to provide for all the wants of the household.

One evening, when I went to make some trifling purchases of her, I heard a sound of quarrelling in the back shop. There were the voices of several women, among

\* The cheap wine shops are outside the Barriers, to avoid the *octroi*, or municipal excise.

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which I distinguished that of Geneviève, broken by sobs. On looking farther in, I perceived the fruit-woman holding a child in her arms, and kissing it, while a country nurse seemed to be claiming her wages from her. The poor woman, who without doubt had exhausted every explanation and every excuse, was crying in silence, and one of her neighbors was trying in vain to appease the countrywoman. Excited by that love of money which the evils of a hard peasant life but too well excuse, and disappointed by the refusal of her expected wages; the nurse was launching forth in recriminations, threats, and abuse. In spite of myself, I listened to the quarrel, not daring to interfere, and not thinking of going away, when Michael Arout appeared at the shop-door.

The joiner had just come from the Barriers, where he had passed part of the day at a public-house. His blouse, without a belt, and untied at the throat, showed none of the noble stains of work: in his hand he held his cap, which he had just picked up out of the mud; his hair was in disorder, his eye fixed, and the pallor of drunkenness in his face. He came reeling in, looked wildly around him, and called Geneviève.

She heard his voice, gave a start, and rushed into the shop; but at the sight of the miserable man, who was trying in vain to steady himself, she pressed the child in her arms, and bent over it with tears.

The countrywoman and the neighbor had followed her.

“Come! come! do you intend to pay me, after all?” cried the former in a rage.

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“Ask the master for the money,” ironically answered the woman from the next door, pointing to the joiner, who had just fallen against the counter.

The countrywoman looked at him.

“Ah! he is the father,” returned she. “Well, what idle beggars! not to have a penny to pay honest people, and get tipsy with wine in that way.”

The drunkard raised his head.

“What! what!” stammered he; “who is it that talks of wine? I’ve had nothing but brandy! But I am going back again to get some wine! Wife, give me your money; there are some friends waiting for me at the *Père la Tuille*.”

Geneviève did not answer: he went round the counter, opened the till, and began to rummage in it.

“You see where the money of the house goes!” observed the neighbor to the countrywoman; “how can the poor unhappy woman pay you when he takes all?”

“Is that my fault?” replied the nurse, angrily. “They owe to me, and somehow or other they must pay me!”

And letting loose her tongue, as these women out of the country do, she began relating at length all the care she had taken of the child, and all the expense it had been to her. In proportion as she recalled all she had done, her words seemed to convince her more than ever of her rights, and to increase her anger. The poor mother, who no doubt feared that her violence would frighten the child, returned into the back shop, and put it into its cradle.

Whether it is that the countrywoman saw in this act a determination to escape her claims, or that she was

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blinded by passion, I cannot say; but she rushed into the next room, where I heard the sounds of quarrelling, with which the cries of the child were soon mingled. The joiner, who was still rummaging in the till, was startled, and raised his head.

At the same moment Geneviève appeared at the door, holding in her arms the baby that the countrywoman was trying to tear from her. She ran toward the counter, and throwing herself behind her husband, cried:

“Michael, defend your son!”

The drunken man quickly stood up erect, like one who awakes with a start.

“My son!” stammered he; “what son?”

His looks fell upon the child; a vague ray of intelligence passed over his features.

“Robert,” resumed he; “it is Robert!”

He tried to steady himself on his feet, that he might take the baby, but he tottered. The nurse approached him in a rage.

“My money, or I shall take the child away!” cried she. “It is I who have fed and brought it up: if you don’t pay me for what has made it live, it ought to be the same to you as if it were dead. I shall not go until I have my due, or the baby.”

“And what would you do with him?” murmured Geneviève, pressing Robert against her bosom.

“Take it to the Foundling!” replied the countrywoman, harshly; “the hospital is a better mother than you are, for it pays for the food of its little ones.”

At the word “Foundling,” Geneviève had exclaimed aloud in horror. With her arms wound round her son,

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whose head she hid in her bosom, and her two hands spread over him, she had retreated to the wall, and remained with her back against it, like a lioness defending her young. The neighbor and I contemplated this scene, without knowing how we could interfere. As for Michael, he looked at us by turns, making a visible effort to comprehend it all. When his eye rested upon Geneviève and the child, it lit up with a gleam of pleasure; but when he turned toward us, he again became stupid and hesitating.

At last, apparently making a prodigious effort, he cried out, “Wait!”

And going to a tub filled with water, he plunged his face into it several times.

Every eye was turned upon him; the countrywoman herself seemed astonished. At length he raised his dripping head. This ablution had partly dispelled his drunkenness; he looked at us for a moment, then he turned to Geneviève, and his face brightened up.

“Robert!” cried he, going up to the child, and taking him in his arms. “Ah! give him me, wife; I must look at him.”

The mother seemed to give up his son to him with reluctance, and stayed before him with her arms extended, as if she feared the child would have a fall. The nurse began again in her turn to speak, and renewed her claims, this time threatening to appeal to law. At first Michael listened to her attentively, and when he comprehended her meaning, he gave the child back to its mother.

“How much do we owe you?” asked he.

The countrywoman began to reckon up the different

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expenses, which amounted to nearly thirty francs. The joiner felt to the bottom of his pockets, but could find nothing. His forehead became contracted by frowns; low curses began to escape him. All of a sudden he rummaged in his breast, drew forth a large watch, and holding it up above his head——

“Here it is—here’s your money!” cried he with a joyful laugh; “a watch, a good one! I always said it would keep for a drink on a dry day; but it is not I who will drink it, but the young one. Ah! ah! ah! go and sell it for me, neighbor, and if that is not enough, I have my earrings. Eh! Geneviève, take them off for me; the earrings will square all! They shall not say you have been disgraced on account of the child—no, not even if I must pledge a bit of my flesh! My watch, my earrings, and my ring—get rid of all of them for me at the goldsmith’s; pay the woman, and let the little fool go to sleep. Give him me, Geneviève; I will put him to bed.”

And, taking the baby from the arms of his mother, he carried him with a firm step to his cradle.

It was easy to perceive the change which took place in Michael from this day. He cut all his old drinking acquaintances. He went early every morning to his work, and returned regularly in the evening to finish the day with Geneviève and Robert. Very soon he would not leave them at all, and he hired a place near the fruit-shop, and worked in it on his own account.

They would soon have been able to live in comfort, had it not been for the expenses which the child required. Everything was given up to his education. He

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had gone through the regular school training, had studied mathematics, drawing, and the carpenter’s trade, and had only begun to work a few months ago. Till now, they had been exhausting every resource which their laborious industry could provide to push him forward in his business; and, happily, all these exertions had not proved useless: the seed had brought forth fruit, and the days of harvest were close by.

While I was thus recalling these remembrances to my mind, Michael had come in, and was occupied in fixing shelves where they were wanted.

During the time I was writing the notes of my journal, I was also scrutinizing the joiner.

The excesses of his youth and the labor of his manhood have deeply marked his face; his hair is thin and gray, his shoulders stoop, his legs are shrunken and slightly bent. There seems a sort of weight in his whole being. His very features have an expression of sorrow and despondency. He answers my questions by monosyllables, and like a man who wishes to avoid conversation. Whence comes this dejection, when one would think he had all he could wish for? I should like to know!

*Ten o’clock.*—Michael is just gone downstairs to look for a tool he has forgotten. I have at last succeeded in drawing from him the secret of his and Geneviève’s sorrow. Their son Robert is the cause of it!

Not that he has turned out ill after all their care—not that he is idle or dissipated; but both were in hopes he would never leave them any more. The presence of the young man was to have renewed and made glad their

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lives once more; his mother counted the days, his father prepared everything to receive their dear associate in their toils; and at the moment when they were thus about to be repaid for all their sacrifices, Robert had suddenly informed them that he had just engaged himself to a contractor at Versailles.

Every remonstrance and every prayer were useless; he brought forward the necessity of initiating himself into all the details of an important contract, the facilities he should have in his new position of improving himself in his trade, and the hopes he had of turning his knowledge to advantage. At, last, when his mother, having come to the end of her arguments, began to cry, he hastily kissed her, and went away that he might avoid any further remonstrances.

He had been absent a year, and there was nothing to give them hopes of his return. His parents hardly saw him once a month, and then he only stayed a few moments with them.

“I have been punished where I had hoped to be rewarded,” Michael said to me just now. “I had wished for a saving and industrious son, and God has given me an ambitious and avaricious one! I had always said to myself that when once he was grown up we should have him always with us, to recall our youth and to enliven our hearts. His mother was always thinking of getting him married, and having children again to care for. You know women always will busy themselves about others. As for me, I thought of him working near my bench, and singing his new songs; for he has learnt music, and is one of the best singers at the *Orphéon*.

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A dream, sir, truly! Directly the bird was fledged, he took to flight, and remembers neither father nor mother. Yesterday, for instance, was the day we expected him; he should have come to supper with us. No Robert to-day, either! He has had some plan to finish, or some bargain to arrange, and his old parents are put down last in the accounts, after the customers and the joiner’s work. Ah! if I could have guessed how it would have turned out! Fool! to have sacrificed my likings and my money, for nearly twenty years, to the education of a thankless son! Was it for this I took the trouble to cure myself of drinking, to break with my friends, to become an example to the neighborhood? The jovial good fellow has made a goose of himself. Oh! if I had to begin again! No, no! you see women and children are our bane. They soften our hearts; they lead us a life of hope and affection; we pass a quarter of our lives in fostering the growth of a grain of corn which is to be everything to us in our old age, and when the harvest-time comes—good-night, the ear is empty!”

While he was speaking, Michael’s voice became hoarse, his eyes fierce, and his lips quivered. I wished to answer him, but I could only think of commonplace consolations, and I remained silent. The joiner pretended he needed a tool, and left me.

Poor father! Ah! I know those moments of temptation when virtue has failed to reward us, and we regret having obeyed her! Who has not felt this weakness in hours of trial, and who has not uttered, at least once, the mournful exclamation of Brutus?

But if virtue is only a word, what is there then in life

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that is true and real? No, I will not believe that goodness is in vain! It does not always give the happiness we had hoped for, but it brings some other. In the world everything is ruled by order, and has its proper and necessary consequences, and virtue cannot be the sole exception to the general law. If it had been prejudicial to those who practised it, experience would have avenged them; but experience has, on the contrary, made it more universal and more holy. We only accuse it of being a faithless debtor because we demand an immediate payment, and one apparent to our senses. We always consider life as a fairy-tale, in which every good action must be rewarded by a visible wonder. We do not accept as payment a peaceful conscience, self-content, or a good name among men—treasures that are more precious than any other, but the value of which we do not feel till after we have lost them!

Michael is come back, and has returned to his work. His son has not yet arrived.

By telling me of his hopes and his grievous disappointments, he became excited; he unceasingly went over again the same subject, always adding something to his griefs. He had just wound up his confidential discourse by speaking to me of a joiner's business which he had hoped to buy, and work to good account with Robert's help. The present owner had made a fortune by it, and, after thirty years of business, he was thinking of retiring to one of the ornamental cottages in the outskirts of the city, a usual retreat for the frugal and successful workingman. Michael had not indeed the two thousand francs which must be paid down; but

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perhaps he could have persuaded Master Benoit to wait. Robert's presence would have been a security for him, for the young man could not fail to insure the prosperity of a workshop; besides science and skill, he had the power of invention and bringing to perfection. His father had discovered among his drawings a new plan for a staircase, which had occupied his thoughts for a long time; and he even suspected him of having engaged himself to the Versailles contractor for the very purpose of executing it. The youth was tormented by this spirit of invention, which took possession of all his thoughts, and, while devoting his mind to study, he had no time to listen to his feelings.

Michael told me all this with a mixed feeling of pride and vexation. I saw he was proud of the son he was abusing, and that his very pride made him more sensitive to that son's neglect.

*Six o'clock P.M.*—I have just finished a happy day. How many events have happened within a few hours, and what a change for Geneviève and Michael!

He had just finished fixing the shelves, and telling me of his son, while I laid the cloth for my breakfast.

Suddenly we heard hurried steps in the passage, the door opened, and Geneviève entered with Robert.

The joiner gave a start of joyful surprise, but he repressed it immediately, as if he wished to keep up the appearance of displeasure.

The young man did not appear to notice it, but threw himself into his arms in an open-hearted manner, which surprised me. Geneviève, whose face shone with hap-

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piness, seemed to wish to speak, and to restrain herself with difficulty.

I told Robert I was glad to see him, and he answered me with ease and civility.

“I expected you yesterday,” said Michael Arout, rather dryly.

“Forgive me, father,” replied the young workman, “but I had business at St. Germain’s. I was not able to come back till it was very late, and then the master kept me.”

The joiner looked at his son sidewise, and then took up his hammer again.

“All right,” muttered he, in a grumbling tone; “when we are with other people we must do as they wish; but there are some who would like better to eat brown bread with their own knife than partridges with the silver fork of a master.”

“And I am one of those, father,” replied Robert, merrily, “but, as the proverb says, “you must shell the peas before you can eat them.” It was necessary that I should first work in a great workshop——”

“To go on with your plan of the staircase,” interrupted Michael, ironically.

“You must now say Monsieur Raymond’s plan, father,” replied Robert, smiling.

“Why?”

“Because I have sold it to him.”

The joiner, who was planing a board, turned round quickly.

“Sold it!” cried he, with sparkling eyes.

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“For the reason that I was not rich enough to give it him.”

Michael threw down the board and tool.

“There he is again!” resumed he, angrily; “his good genius puts an idea into his head which would have made him known, and he goes and sells it to a rich man, who will take the honor of it himself.”

“Well, what harm is there done?” asked Geneviève.

“What harm!” cried the joiner, in a passion. “You understand nothing about it—you are a woman; but he—he knows well that a true workman never gives up his own inventions for money, no more than a soldier would give up his cross. That is his glory; he is bound to keep it for the honor it does him! Ah, thunder! if I had ever made a discovery, rather than put it up at auction I would have sold one of my eyes! Don’t you see that a new invention is like a child to a workman? He takes care of it, he brings it up, he makes a way for it in the world, and it is only a poor creature who sells it.”

Robert colored a little.

“You will think differently, father,” said he, “when you know why I sold my plan.”

“Yes, and you will thank him for it,” added Geneviève, who could no longer keep silence.

“Never!” replied Michael.

“But, wretched man!” cried she, “he sold it only for our sakes!”

The joiner looked at his wife and son with astonishment. It was necessary to come to an explanation. The latter related how he had entered into a negotiation with Master Benoit, who had positively refused

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to sell his business unless one half of the two thousand francs were first paid down. It was in the hopes of obtaining this sum that he had gone to work with the contractor at Versailles; he had had an opportunity of trying his invention, and of finding a purchaser. Thanks to the money he received for it, he had just concluded the bargain with Benoit, and had brought his father the key of the new work-yard.

This explanation was given by the young workman with so much modesty and simplicity that I was quite affected by it. Geneviève cried; Michael pressed his son to his heart, and in a long embrace he seemed to ask his pardon for having unjustly accused him.

All was now explained with honor to Robert. The conduct which his parents had ascribed to indifference really sprang from affection; he had neither obeyed the voice of ambition nor of avarice, nor even the nobler inspiration of inventive genius; his whole motive and single aim had been the happiness of Geneviève and Michael. The day for proving his gratitude had come, and he had returned them sacrifice for sacrifice!

After the explanations and exclamations of joy were over, all three were about to leave me; but, the cloth being laid, I added three more places, and kept them to breakfast.

The meal was prolonged: the fare was only tolerable; but the overflowings of affection made it delicious. Never had I better understood the unspeakable charm of family love. What calm enjoyment in that happiness which is always shared with others; in that community of interests which unites such various feelings; in that

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association of existences which forms one single being of so many! What is man without those home affections, which, like so many roots, fix him firmly in the earth, and permit him to imbibe all the juices of life? Energy, happiness—do not all these come from them? Without family life where would man learn to love, to associate, to deny himself? A community in little, is it not this which teaches us how to live in the great one? Such is the holiness of home, that, to express our relation with God, we have been obliged to borrow the words invented for our family life. Men have named themselves the *sons* of a heavenly *Father*!

Ah! let us carefully preserve these chains of domestic union. Do not let us unbind the human sheaf, and scatter its ears to all the caprices of chance and of the winds; but let us rather enlarge this holy law; let us carry the principles and the habits of home beyond sit bounds; and, if it may be, let us realize the prayer of the Apostle of the Gentiles when he exclaimed to the new-born children of Christ: “Be ye like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”\*

\* Philippians ii. 2.

## CHAPTER X

### OUR COUNTRY

*October 12th, Seven O'clock A.M.*



THE nights are already become cold and long; the sun, shining through my curtains, no more wakens me long before the hour for work; and even when my eyes are open, the pleasant warmth of the bed keeps me fast under my counterpane. Every morning there begins a long argument between my activity and my indolence; and, snugly wrapped up to the eyes, I wait like the Gascon, until they have succeeded in coming to an agreement.

This morning, however, a light, which shone from my door upon my pillow, awoke me earlier than usual. In vain I turned on my side; the persevering light, like a victorious enemy, pursued me into every position. At last, quite out of patience, I sat up and hurled my nightcap to the foot of the bed!

(I will observe, by way of parenthesis, that the various evolutions of this pacific headgear seem to have been, from the remotest time, symbols of the vehement emotions of the mind; for our language has borrowed its most common images from them. Thus we say: *Mettre son bonnet de travers; jeter son*

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*bonnet par-dessus les moulins; avoir la tête près du bonnet, etc.\*)*

But be this as it may, I got up in a very bad humor, grumbling at my new neighbor, who took it into his head to be wakeful when I wished to sleep. We are all made thus; we do not understand that others may live on their own account. Each one of us is like the earth, according to the old system of Ptolemy, and thinks he can have the whole universe revolve around himself. On this point, to make use of the metaphor alluded to: *Tous les hommes ont la tête dans le même bonnet.* †

I had for the time being, as I have already said, thrown mine to the other end of my bed; and I slowly disengaged my legs from the warm bedclothes, while making a host of evil reflections upon the inconvenience of having neighbors.

For more than a month I had not had to complain of those whom chance had given me; most of them only came in to sleep, and went away again on rising. I was almost always alone on this top story—alone with the clouds and the sparrows!

But at Paris nothing lasts; the current of life carries us along, like the seaweed torn from the rock; the houses are vessels which take mere passengers. How many different faces have I already seen pass along the landing-place belonging to our attics! How many companions of a few days have disappeared forever! Some

\* To be in a bad humor; to brave the opinions of the world; to be angry about a trifle.

† Said of those who are of the same opinions and tastes.

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are lost in that medley of the living which whirls continually under the scourge of necessity, and others in that resting-place of the dead, who sleep under the hand of God!

Peter the bookbinder is one of these last. Wrapped up in selfishness, he lived alone and friendless, and he died as he had lived. His loss was neither mourned by any one, nor disarranged anything in the world; there was merely a ditch filled up in the graveyard, and an attic emptied in our house.

It is the same which my new neighbor has inhabited for the last few days.

To say truly (now that I am quite awake, and my ill humor is gone with my nightcap)—to say truly, this new neighbor, although rising earlier than suits my idleness, is not the less a very good man: he carries his misfortunes, as few know how to carry their good fortunes, with cheerfulness and moderation.

But fate has cruelly tried him. Father Chaufour is but the wreck of a man. In the place of one of his arms hangs an empty sleeve; his left leg is made by the turner, and he drags the right along with difficulty; but above these ruins rises a calm and happy face. While looking upon his countenance, radiant with a serene energy, while listening to his voice, the tone of which has, so to speak, the accent of goodness, we see that the soul has remained entire in the half-destroyed covering. The fortress is a little damaged, as Father Chaufour says, but the garrison is quite hearty.

Decidedly, the more I think of this excellent man,

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the more I reproach myself for the sort of malediction I bestowed on him when I awoke.

We are generally too indulgent in our secret wrongs toward our neighbor. All ill-will which does not pass the region of thought seems innocent to us, and, with our clumsy justice, we excuse without examination the sin which does not betray itself by action!

But are we then bound to others only by the enforcement of laws? Besides these external relations, is there not a real relation of feeling between men? Do we not owe to all those who live under the same heaven as ourselves the aid not only of our acts but of our purposes? Ought not every human life to be to us like a vessel that we accompany with our prayers for a happy voyage? It is not enough that men do not harm one another; they must also help and love one another! The papal benediction, *Urbi et orbi!* should be the constant cry from all hearts. To condemn him who does not deserve it, even in the mind, even by a passing thought, is to break the great law, that which has established the union of souls here below, and to which Christ has given the sweet name of *charity*.

These thoughts came into my mind as I finished dressing, and I said to myself that Father Chaufour had a right to reparation from me. To make amends for the feeling of ill-will I had against him just now, I owed him some explicit proof of sympathy. I heard him humming a tune in his room; he was at work, and I determined that I would make the first neighborly call.

*Eight o’clock P.M.*—I found Father Chaufour at a

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table lighted by a little smoky lamp, without a fire, although it is already cold, and making large pasteboard boxes; he was humming a popular song in a low tone. I had hardly entered the room when he uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Eh! is it you, neighbor? Come in, then! I did not think you got up so early, so I put a damper on my music; I was afraid of waking you."

Excellent man! while I was sending him to the devil he was putting himself out of his way for me!

This thought touched me, and I paid my compliments on his having become my neighbor with a warmth which opened his heart.

"Faith! you seem to me to have the look of a good Christian," said he in a voice of soldierlike cordiality, and shaking me by the hand. "I do not like those people who look on a landing-place as a frontier line, and treat their neighbors as if they were Cossacks. When men snuff the same air, and speak the same lingo, they are not meant to turn their backs to each other. Sit down there, neighbor; I don't mean to order you; only take care of the stool; it has but three legs, and we must put good-will in place of the fourth."

"It seems that that is a treasure which there is no want of here," I observed.

"Good-will!" repeated Chaufour; "that is all my mother left me, and I take it no son has received a better inheritance. Therefore they used to call me *Monsieur Content* in the batteries."

"You are a soldier, then?"

"I served in the Third Artillery under the Republic,

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and afterward in the Guard, through all the commotions. I was at Jemappes and at Waterloo; so I was at the christening and at the burial of our glory, as one may say!”

I looked at him with astonishment.

“And how old were you then, at Jemappes?” asked I.

“Somewhere about fifteen,” said he.

“How came you to think of being a soldier so early?”

“I did not really think about it. I then worked at toy-making, and never dreamed that France would ask me for anything else than to make her draught-boards, shuttlecocks, and cups and balls. But I had an old uncle at Vincennes whom I went to see from time to time—a Fontenoy veteran in the same rank of life as myself, but with ability enough to have risen to that of a marshal. Unluckily, in those days there was no way for common people to get on. My uncle, whose services would have got him made a prince under *the other*, had then retired with the mere rank of sub-lieutenant. But you should have seen him in his uniform, his cross of St. Louis, his wooden leg, his white moustaches, and his noble countenance. You would have said he was a portrait of one of those old heroes in powdered hair which are at Versailles!

“Every time I visited him, he said something which remained fixed in my memory. But one day I found him quite grave.

“‘Jerome,’ said he, ‘do you know what is going on on the frontier?’

“‘No, lieutenant,’ replied I.

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“‘Well,’ resumed he, ‘our country is in danger!’

“I did not well understand him, and yet it seemed something to me.

“‘Perhaps you have never thought what your country means,’ continued he, placing his hand on my shoulder; ‘it is all that surrounds you, all that has brought you up and fed you, all that you have loved! This ground that you see, these houses, these trees, those girls who go along there laughing—this is your country! The laws which protect you, the bread which pays for your work, the words you interchange with others, the joy and grief which come to you from the men and things among which you live—this is your country! The little room where you used to see your mother, the remembrances she has left you, the earth where she rests—this is your country! You see it, you breathe it, everywhere! Think to yourself, my son, of your rights and your duties, your affections and your wants, your past and your present blessings; write them all under a single name—and that name will be your country!’

“I was trembling with emotion, and great tears were in my eyes.

“‘Ah! I understand,’ cried I; ‘it is our home in large; it is that part of the world where God has placed our body and our soul.’

“‘You are right, Jerome,’ continued the old soldier; ‘so you comprehend also what we owe it.’

“‘Truly,’ resumed I, ‘we owe it all that we are; it is a question of love.’

“‘And of honesty, my son,’ concluded he. ‘The member of a family who does not contribute his share

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of work and of happiness fails in his duty, and is a bad kinsman; the member of a partnership who does not enrich it with all his might, with all his courage, and with all his heart, defrauds it of what belongs to it, and is a dishonest man. It is the same with him who enjoys the advantages of having a country, and does not accept the burdens of it; he forfeits his honor, and is a bad citizen!’

“‘And what must one do, lieutenant, to be a good citizen?’ asked I.

“‘Do for your country what you would do for your father and mother,’ said he.

“I did not answer at the moment; my heart was swelling, and the blood boiling in my veins; but on returning along the road, my uncle’s words were, so to speak, written up before my eyes. I repeated, ‘Do for your country what you would do for your father and mother.’ And my country is in danger; an enemy attacks it, while I—I turn cups and balls!

“This thought tormented me so much all night that the next day I returned to Vincennes to announce to the lieutenant that I had just enlisted, and was going off to the frontier. The brave man pressed upon me his cross of St. Louis, and I went away as proud as an ambassador.

“That is how, neighbor, I became a volunteer under the Republic before I had cut my wisdom teeth.”

All this was told quietly, and in the cheerful spirit of him who looks upon an accomplished duty neither as a merit nor a grievance.

While he spoke, Father Chaufour grew animated, not

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on account of himself, but of the general subject. Evidently that which occupied him in the drama of life was not his own part, but the drama itself.

This sort of disinterestedness touched me. I prolonged my visit, and showed myself as frank as possible, in order to win his confidence in return. In an hour's time he knew my position and my habits; I was on the footing of an old acquaintance.

I even confessed the ill-humor the light of his lamp put me into a short time before. He took what I said with the touching cheerfulness which comes from a heart in the right place, and which looks upon everything on the good side. He neither spoke to me of the necessity which obliged him to work while I could sleep, nor of the deprivations of the old soldier compared to the luxury of the young clerk; he only struck his forehead, accused himself of thoughtlessness, and promised to put list round his door!

O great and beautiful soul! with whom nothing turns to bitterness, and who art peremptory only in duty and benevolence!

*October 15th.*—This morning I was looking at a little engraving I had framed myself, and hung over my writing-table; it is a design of Gavarni's, in which, in a grave mood, he has represented a veteran and a conscript.

By often contemplating these two figures, so different in expression, and so true to life, both have become living in my eyes; I have seen them move, I have heard them speak; the picture has become a real scene, at which I am present as spectator.

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The veteran advances slowly, his hand leaning on the shoulder of the young soldier. His eyes, closed for ever, no longer perceive the sun shining through the flowering chestnut-trees. In the place of his right arm hangs an empty sleeve, and he walks with a wooden leg, the sound of which on the pavement makes those who pass turn to look.

At the sight of this ancient wreck from our patriotic wars, the greater number shake their heads in pity, and I seem to hear a sigh or an imprecation.

“See the worth of glory!” says a portly merchant, turning away his eyes in horror.

“What a deplorable use of human life!” rejoins a young man who carries a volume of philosophy under his arm.

“The trooper would better not have left his plow,” adds a countryman, with a cunning air.

“Poor old man!” murmurs a woman, almost crying.

The veteran has heard, and he knits his brow; for it seems to him that his guide has grown thoughtful. The latter, attracted by what he hears around him, hardly answers the old man’s questions, and his eyes, vaguely lost in space, seem to be seeking there for the solution of some problem.

I seem to see a twitching in the gray moustaches of the veteran; he stops abruptly, and, holding back his guide with his remaining arm——

“They all pity me,” says he, “because they do not understand it; but if I were to answer them——”

“What would you say to them, father?” asks the young man, with curiosity.

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“I should say first to the woman who weeps when she looks at me, to keep her tears for other misfortunes; for each of my wounds calls to mind some struggle for my colors. There is room for doubting how some men have done their duty; with me it is visible. I carry the account of my services, written with the enemy’s steel and lead, on myself; to pity me for having done my duty is to suppose I would better have been false to it.”

“And what would you say to the countryman, father?”

“I should tell him that, to drive the plow in peace, we must first secure the country itself; and that, as long as there are foreigners ready to eat our harvest, there must be arms to defend it.”

“But the young student, too, shook his head when he lamented such a use of life.”

“Because he does not know what self-sacrifice and suffering can teach. The books that he studies we have put in practice, though we never read them: the principles he applauds we have defended with powder and bayonet.”

“And at the price of your limbs and your blood. The merchant said, when he saw your maimed body, ‘See the worth of glory!’”

“Do not believe him, my son: the true glory is the bread of the soul; it is this which nourishes self-sacrifice, patience, and courage. The Master of all has bestowed it as a tie the more between men. When we desire to be distinguished by our brethren, do we not thus prove our esteem and our sympathy for them? The longing for admiration is but one side of love. No,

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no; the true glory can never be too dearly paid for! That which we should deplore, child, is not the infirmities which prove a generous self-sacrifice, but those which our vices or our imprudence have called forth. Ah! if I could speak aloud to those who, when passing, cast looks of pity upon me, I should say to the young man whose excesses have dimmed his sight before he is old, ‘What have you done with your eyes?’ To the slothful man, who with difficulty drags along his enervated mass of flesh, ‘What have you done with your feet?’ To the old man, who is punished for his intemperance by the gout, ‘What have you done with your hands?’ To all, ‘What have you done with the days God granted you, with the faculties you should have employed for the good of your brethren?’ If you cannot answer, bestow no more of your pity upon the old soldier maimed in his country’s cause; for he—he at least—can show his scars without shame.”

*October 16th.*—The little engraving has made me comprehend better the merits of Father Chaufour, and I therefore esteem him all the more.

He has just now left my attic. There no longer passes a single day without his coming to work by my fire, or my going to sit and talk by his board.

The old artilleryman has seen much, and likes to tell of it. For twenty years he was an armed traveller throughout Europe, and he fought without hatred, for he was possessed by a single thought—the honor of the national flag! It might have been his superstition, if you will; but it was, at the same time, his safeguard.

The word **FRANCE**, which was then resounding so

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gloriously through the world, served as a talisman to him against all sorts of temptation. To have to support a great name may seem a burden to vulgar minds, but it is an encouragement to vigorous ones.

"I, too, have had many moments," said he to me the other day, "when I have been tempted to make friends with the devil. War is not precisely the school for rural virtues. By dint of burning, destroying, and killing, you grow a little tough as regards your feelings; 'and, when the bayonet has made you king, the notions of an autocrat come into your head a little strongly. But at these moments I called to mind that country which the lieutenant spoke of to me, and I whispered to myself the well-known phrase, *Toujours Français!* It has been laughed at since. People who would make a joke of the death of their mother have turned it into ridicule, as if the name of our country was not also a noble and a binding thing. For my part, I shall never forget from how many follies the title of Frenchman has kept me. When, overcome with fatigue, I have found myself in the rear of the colors, and when the musketry was rattling in the front ranks, many a time I heard a voice, which whispered in my ear, 'Leave the others to fight, and for to-day take care of your own hide!' But then, that word *Français!* murmured within me, and I pressed forward to help my comrades. At other times, when, irritated by hunger, cold, and wounds, I have arrived at the hovel of some *Meinherr*, I have been seized by an itching to break the master's back, and to burn his hut; but I whispered to myself, *Français!* and this name would not rhyme with either incendiary or mur-

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derer. I have, in this way, passed through kingdoms from east to west, and from north to south, always determined not to bring disgrace upon my country’s flag. The lieutenant, you see, had taught me a magic word—*My country!* Not only must we defend it, but we must also make it great and loved.”

*October 17th.*—To-day I have paid my neighbor a long visit. A chance expression led the way to his telling me more of himself than he had yet done.

I asked him whether both his limbs had been lost in the same battle.

“No, no!” replied he; “the cannon only took my leg; it was the Clamart quarries that my arm went to feed.”

And when I asked him for the particulars—

“That’s as easy as to say good-morning,” continued he. “After the great break-up at Waterloo, I stayed three months in the camp hospital to give my wooden leg time to grow. As soon as I was able to hobble a little, I took leave of headquarters, and took the road to Paris, where I hoped to find some relative or friend; but no—all were gone, or underground. I should have found myself less strange at Vienna, Madrid, or Berlin. And although I had a leg the less to provide for, I was none the better off; my appetite had come back, and my last sous were taking flight.

“I had indeed met my old colonel, who recollects that I had helped him out of the skirmish at Montereau by giving him my horse, and he had offered me bed and board at his house. I knew that the year before he had married a castle and no few farms, so that I might be-

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come permanent coat-brusher to a millionaire, which was not without its temptations. It remained to see if I had not anything better to do. One evening I set myself to reflect upon it.

“‘Let us see, Chaufour,’ said I to myself; ‘the question is to act like a man. The colonel’s place suits you, but cannot you do anything better? Your body is still in good condition, and your arms strong; do you not owe all your strength to your country, as your Vincennes uncle said? Why not leave some old soldier, more cut up than you are, to get his hospital at the colonel’s? Come, trooper, you are still fit for another stout charge or two! You must not lay up before your time.’

“Whereupon I went to thank the colonel, and to offer my services to an old artilleryman, who had gone back to his home at Clamart, and who had taken up the quarryman’s pick again.

“For the first few months I played the conscript’s part—that is to say, there was more stir than work; but with a good will one gets the better of stones, as of everything else. I did not become, so to speak, the leader of a column, but I brought up the rank among the good workmen, and I ate my bread with a good appetite, seeing I had earned it with a good will. For even underground, you see, I still kept my pride. The thought that I was working to do my part in changing rocks into houses pleased my heart. I said to myself, ‘Courage, Chaufour, my old boy; you are helping to beautify your country.’ And that kept up my spirit.

“Unfortunately, some of my companions were rather too sensible to the charms of the brandy-bottle; so

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much so, that one day one of them, who could hardly distinguish his right hand from his left, thought proper to strike a light close to a charged mine. The mine exploded suddenly, and sent a shower of stone grape among us, which killed three men, and carried away the arm of which I have now only the sleeve.”

“So you were again without means of living?” said I to the old soldier.

“That is to say, I had to change them,” replied he, quietly. “The difficulty was to find one which would do with five fingers instead of ten; I found it, however.”

“How was that?”

“Among the Paris street-sweepers.”

“What! you have been one——”

“Of the pioneers of the health force for a while, neighbor, and that was not my worst time either. The corps of sweepers is not so low as it is dirty, I can tell you! There are old actresses in it who could never learn to save their money, and ruined merchants from the exchange; we even had a professor of classics, who for a little drink would recite Latin to you, or Greek tragedies, as you chose. They could not have competed for the Monthyon prize; but we excused faults on account of poverty, and cheered our poverty by our good-humor and jokes. I was as ragged and as cheerful as the rest, while trying to be something better. Even in the mire of the gutter I preserved my faith that nothing is dishonorable which is useful to our country.

“‘Chaufour,’ said I to myself with a smile, ‘after the sword, the hammer; after the hammer, the broom;

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you are going downstairs, my old boy, but you are still serving your country.””

““However, you ended by leaving your new profession?” said I.

“A reform was required, neighbor. The street-sweepers seldom have their feet dry, and the damp at last made the wounds in my good leg open again. I could no longer follow the regiment, and it was necessary to lay down my arms. It is now two months since I left off working in the sanitary department of Paris.

“At the first moment I was daunted. Of my four limbs, I had now only my right hand, and even that had lost its strength; so it was necessary to find some gentlemanly occupation for it. After trying a little of everything, I fell upon card-box making, and here I am at cases for the lace and buttons of the national guard; it is work of little profit, but it is within the capacity of all. By getting up at four and working till eight, I earn sixty-five centimes; my lodging and bowl of soup take fifty of them, and there are three sous over for luxuries. So I am richer than France herself, for I have no deficit in my budget; and I continue to serve her, as I save her lace and buttons.””

At these words Father Chaufour looked at me with a smile, and with his great scissors began cutting the green paper again for his cardboard cases. My heart was touched, and I remained lost in thought.

Here is still another member of that sacred phalanx who, in the battle of life, always march in front for the example and the salvation of the world! Each of these brave soldiers has his war-cry; for this one it is “Coun-

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try,” for that “Home,” for a third “Mankind;” but they all follow the same standard—that of duty; for all the same divine law reigns—that of self-sacrifice. To love something more than one’s self—that is the secret of all that is great; to know how to live for others—that is the aim of all noble souls.

## CHAPTER XI

### MORAL USE OF INVENTORIES

*November 13th, Nine O'clock P.M.*



HAD well stopped up the chinks of my window; my little carpet was nailed down in its place; my lamp, provided with its shade, cast a subdued light around, and my stove made a low, murmuring sound, as if some live creature was sharing my hearth with me.

All was silent around me. But, out of doors the snow and rain swept the roofs, and with a low, rushing sound ran along the gurgling gutters; sometimes a gust of wind forced itself beneath the tiles, which rattled together like castanets, and afterward it was lost in the empty corridor. Then a slight and pleasurable shiver thrilled through my veins: I drew the flaps of my old wadded dressing-gown around me, I pulled my threadbare velvet cap over my eyes, and, letting myself sink deeper into my easy-chair, while my feet basked in the heat and light which shone through the door of the stove, I gave myself up to a sensation of enjoyment, made more lively by the consciousness of the storm which raged without. My eyes, swimming in a sort of mist, wandered over all the details of my peaceful abode; they passed from

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my prints to my bookcase, resting upon the little chintz sofa, the white curtains of the iron bedstead, and the portfolio of loose papers — those archives of the attics; and then, returning to the book I held in my hand, they attempted to seize once more the thread of the reading which had been thus interrupted.

In fact, this book, the subject of which had at first interested me, had become painful to me. I had come to the conclusion that the pictures of the writer were too sombre. His description of the miseries of the world appeared exaggerated to me; I could not believe in such excess of poverty and of suffering; neither God nor man could show themselves so harsh toward the sons of Adam. The author had yielded to an artistic temptation: he was making a show of the sufferings of humanity, as Nero burned Rome for the sake of the picturesque.

Taken altogether, this poor human house, so often repaired, so much criticised, is still a pretty good abode; we may find enough in it to satisfy our wants, if we know how to set bounds to them; the happiness of the wise man costs but little, and asks but little space.

These consoling reflections became more and more confused. At last my book fell on the ground without my having the resolution to stoop and take it up again; and insensibly overcome by the luxury of the silence, the subdued light, and the warmth, I fell asleep.

I remained for some time lost in the sort of insensibility belonging to a first sleep; at last some vague and broken sensations came over me. It seemed to me that

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the day grew darker, that the air became colder. I half perceived bushes covered with the scarlet berries which foretell the coming of winter. I walked on a dreary road, bordered here and there with juniper-trees white with frost. Then the scene suddenly changed. I was in the diligence; the cold wind shook the doors and windows; the trees, loaded with snow, passed by like ghosts; in vain I thrust my benumbed feet into the crushed straw. At last the carriage stopped, and, by one of those stage effects so common in sleep, I found myself alone in a barn, without a fireplace, and open to the winds on all sides. I saw again my mother's gentle face, known only to me in my early childhood, the noble and stern countenance of my father, the little fair head of my sister, who was taken from us at ten years old; all my dead family lived again around me; they were there, exposed to the bitings of the cold and to the pangs of hunger. My mother prayed by the resigned old man, and my sister, rolled up on some rags of which they had made her a bed, wept in silence, and held her naked feet in her little blue hands.

It was a page from the book I had just read transferred into my own existence.

My heart was oppressed with inexpressible anguish. Crouched in a corner, with my eyes fixed upon this dismal picture, I felt the cold slowly creeping upon me, and I said to myself with bitterness:

“Let us die, since poverty is a dungeon guarded by suspicion, apathy, and contempt, and from which it is vain to try to escape; let us die, since there is no place for us at the banquet of the living!”

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And I tried to rise to join my mother again, and to wait at her feet for the hour of release.

This effort dispelled my dream, and I awoke with a start.

I looked around me; my lamp was expiring, the fire in my stove extinguished, and my half-opened door was letting in an icy wind. I got up, with a shiver, to shut and double-lock it; then I made for the alcove, and went to bed in haste.

But the cold kept me awake a long time, and my thoughts continued the interrupted dream.

The pictures I had lately accused of exaggeration now seemed but a too faithful representation of reality; and I went to sleep without being able to recover my optimism—or my warmth.

Thus did a cold stove and a badly closed door alter my point of view.: All went well when my blood circulated properly; all looked gloomy when the cold laid hold on me.

This reminds me of the story of the duchess who was obliged to pay a visit to the neighboring convent on a winter's day. The convent was poor, there was no wood, and the monks had nothing but their discipline and the ardor of their prayers to keep out the cold. The duchess, who was shivering with cold, returned home, greatly pitying the poor monks. While the servants were taking off her cloak and adding two more logs to her fire, she called her steward, whom she ordered to send some wood to the convent immediately. She then had her couch moved close to the fireside, the warmth of which soon revived her. The recollection of

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what she had just suffered was speedily lost in her present comfort, when the steward came in again to ask how many loads of wood he was to send.

"Oh! you may wait," said the great lady carelessly; "the weather is very much milder."

Thus, man's judgments are formed less from reason than from sensation; and as sensation comes to him from the outward world, so he finds himself more or less under its influence; by little and little he imbibes a portion of his habits and feelings from it.

It is not, then, without cause that, when we wish to judge of a stranger beforehand, we look for indications of his character in the circumstances which surround him. The things among which we live are necessarily made to take our image, and we unconsciously leave in them a thousand impressions of our minds. As we can judge by an empty bed of the height and attitude of him who has slept in it, so the abode of every man discovers to a close observer the extent of his intelligence and the feelings of his heart. *Bernardin de St.-Pierre* has related the story of a young girl who refused a suitor because he would never have flowers or domestic animals in his house. Perhaps the sentence was severe, but not without reason. We may presume that a man insensible to beauty and to humble affection must be ill prepared to feel the enjoyments of a happy marriage.

*14th, seven o'clock P.M.*—This morning, as I was opening my journal to write, I had a visit from our old cashier.

His sight is not so good as it was, his hand begins to shake, and the work he was able to do formerly is now

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becoming somewhat laborious to him. I had undertaken to write out some of his papers, and he came for those I had finished.

We conversed a long time by the stove, while he was drinking a cup of coffee which I made him take.

M. Rateau is a sensible man, who has observed much and speaks little; so that he has always something to say.

While looking over the accounts I had prepared for him, his look fell upon my journal, and I was obliged to acknowledge that in this way I wrote a diary of my actions and thoughts every evening for private use. From one thing to another, I began speaking to him of my dream the day before, and my reflections about the influence of outward objects upon our ordinary sentiments. He smiled.

“Ah! you, too, have my superstitions,” he said, quietly. “I have always believed, like you, that you may know the game by the lair: it is only necessary to have tact and experience; but without them we commit ourselves to many rash judgments. For my part, I have been guilty of this more than once, but sometimes I have also drawn a right conclusion. I recollect especially an adventure which goes as far back as the first years of my youth——”

He stopped. I looked at him as if I waited for his story, and he told it me at once.

At this time he was still but third clerk to an attorney at Orleans. His master had sent him to Montargis on different affairs, and he intended to return in the diligence the same evening, after having received the

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amount of a bill at a neighboring town; but they kept him at the debtor's house, and when he was able to set out the day had already closed.

Fearing not to be able to reach Montargis in good time, he took a crossroad they pointed out to him. Unfortunately the fog increased, no star was visible in the heavens, and the darkness became so great that he lost his road. He tried to retrace his steps, passed twenty footpaths, and at last was completely astray.

After the vexation of losing his place in the diligence, came the feeling of uneasiness as to his situation. He was alone, on foot, lost in a forest, without any means of finding his right road again, and with a considerable sum of money about him, for which he was responsible. His anxiety was increased by his inexperience. The idea of a forest was connected in his mind with so many adventures of robbery and murder, that he expected some fatal encounter every instant.

To say the truth, his situation was not encouraging. The place was not considered safe, and for some time past there had been rumors of the sudden disappearance of several horse-dealers, though there was no trace of any crime having been committed.

Our young traveller, with his eyes staring forward, and his ears listening, followed a footpath which he supposed might take him to some house or road; but woods always succeeded to woods. At last he perceived a light at a distance, and in a quarter of an hour he reached the highroad.

A single house, the light from which had attracted

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him, appeared at a little distance. He was going toward the entrance gate of the courtyard, when the trot of a horse made him turn his head. A man on horseback had just appeared at the turning of the road, and in an instant was close to him.

The first words he addressed to the young man showed him to be the farmer himself. He related how he had lost himself, and learned from the countryman that he was on the road to Pithiviers. Montargis was three leagues behind him.

The fog had insensibly changed into a drizzling rain, which was beginning to wet the young clerk through; he seemed afraid of the distance he had still to go, and the horseman, who saw his hesitation, invited him to come into the farmhouse.

It had something of the look of a fortress. Surrounded by a pretty high wall, it could not be seen except through the bars of the great gate, which was carefully closed. The farmer, who had got off his horse, did not go near it, but, turning to the right, reached another entrance closed in the same way, but of which he had the key.

Hardly had he passed the threshold when a terrible barking resounded from each end of the yard. The farmer told his guest to fear nothing, and showed him the dogs chained up to their kennels; both were of an extraordinary size, and so savage that the sight of their master himself could not quiet them.

A boy, attracted by their barking, came out of the house and took the farmer's horse. The latter began questioning him about some orders he had given before

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he left the house, and went toward the stable to see that they had been executed.

Thus left alone, our clerk looked about him.

A lantern which the boy had placed on the ground cast a dim light over the courtyard. All around seemed empty and deserted. Not a trace was visible of the disorder often seen in a country farmyard, and which shows a temporary cessation of the work which is soon to be resumed again. Neither a cart forgotten where the horses had been unharnessed, nor sheaves of corn heaped up ready for threshing, nor a plow overturned in a corner and half hidden under the freshly-cut clover. The yard was swept, the barns shut up and padlocked. Not a single vine creeping up the walls; everywhere stone, wood, and iron!

He took up the lantern and went up to the corner of the house. Behind was a second yard, where he heard the barking of a third dog, and a covered wall was built in the middle of it.

Our traveller looked in vain for the little farm garden, where pumpkins of different sorts creep along the ground, or where the bees from the hives hum under the hedges of honeysuckle and elder. Verdure and flowers were nowhere to be seen. He did not even perceive the sight of a poultry-yard or pigeon-house. The habitation of his host was everywhere wanting in that which makes the grace and the life of the country.

The young man thought that his host must be of a very careless or a very calculating disposition, to concede so little to domestic enjoyments and the pleasures of the eye; and judging, in spite of himself, by what

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he saw, he could not help feeling a distrust of his character.

In the mean time the farmer returned from the stables, and made him enter the house.

The inside of the farmhouse corresponded to its outside. The whitewashed walls had no other ornament than a row of guns of all sizes; the massive furniture hardly redeemed its clumsy appearance by its great solidity. The cleanliness was doubtful, and the absence of all minor conveniences proved that a woman’s care was wanting in the household concerns. The young clerk learned that the farmer, in fact, lived here with no one but his two sons.

Of this, indeed, the signs were plain enough. A table with the cloth laid, that no one had taken the trouble to clear away, was left near the window. The plates and dishes were scattered upon it without any order, and loaded with potato-parings and half-picked bones. Several empty bottles emitted an odor of brandy, mixed with the pungent smell of tobacco-smoke

After seating his guest, the farmer lighted his pipe, and his two sons resumed their work by the fireside. Now and then the silence was just broken by a short remark, answered by a word or an exclamation; and then all became as mute as before.

“From my childhood,” said the old cashier, “I had been very sensible to the impression of outward objects; later in life, reflection had taught me to study the causes of these impressions rather than to drive them away. I set myself, then, to examine everything around me with great attention.

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“Below the guns, I had remarked on entering, some wolf-traps were suspended, and to one of them still hung the mangled remains of a wolf’s paw, which they had not yet taken off from the iron teeth. The blackened chimneypiece was ornamented by an owl and a raven nailed on the wall, their wings extended, and their throats with a huge nail through each; a fox’s skin, freshly flayed, was spread before the window; and a larder hook, fixed into the principal beam, held a headless goose, whose body swayed about over our heads.

“My eyes were offended by all these details, and I turned them again upon my hosts. The father, who sat opposite to me, only interrupted his smoking to pour out his drink, or address some reprimand to his sons. The eldest of these was scraping a deep bucket, and the bloody scrapings, which he threw into the fire every instant, filled the room with a disagreeable fetid smell; the second son was sharpening some butcher’s knives. I learned from a word dropped from the father that they were preparing to kill a pig the next day.

“These occupations and the whole aspect of things inside the house told of such habitual coarseness in their way of living as seemed to explain, while it formed the fitting counterpart of, the forbidding gloominess of the outside. My astonishment by degrees changed into disgust, and my disgust into uneasiness. I cannot detail the whole chain of ideas which succeeded one another in my imagination; but, yielding to an impulse I could not overcome, I got up, declaring I would go on my road again.

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“The farmer made some effort to keep me; he spoke of the rain, of the darkness, and of the length of the way. I replied to all by the absolute necessity there was for my being at Montargis that very night; and thanking him for his brief hospitality, I set off again in a haste which might well have confirmed the truth of my words to him.

“However, the freshness of the night and the exercise of walking did not fail to change the directions of my thoughts. When away from the objects which had awakened such lively disgust in me, I felt it gradually diminishing. I began to smile at the susceptibility of my feelings, and then, in proportion as the rain became heavier and colder, these strictures on myself assumed a tone of ill-temper. I silently accused myself of the absurdity of mistaking sensation for admonitions of my reason. After all, were not the farmer and his sons free to live alone, to hunt, to keep dogs, and to kill a pig? Where was the crime of it? With less nervous susceptibility, I should have accepted the shelter they offered me, and I should now be sleeping snugly on a truss of straw, instead of walking with difficulty through the cold and drizzling rain. I thus continued to reproach myself, until, toward morning, I arrived at Montargis, jaded and benumbed with cold.

“When, however, I got up refreshed, toward the middle of the next day, I instinctively returned to my first opinion. The appearance of the farmhouse presented itself to me under the same repulsive colors which the evening before had determined me to make my escape from it. Reason itself remained silent when

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reviewing all those coarse details, and was forced to recognize in them the indications of a low nature, or else the presence of some baleful influence.

"I went away the next day without being able to learn anything concerning the farmer or his sons; but the recollection of my adventure remained deeply fixed in my memory.

"Ten years afterward I was travelling in the diligence through the department of the Loiret; I was leaning from the window, and looking at some coppice ground now for the first time brought under cultivation, and the mode of clearing which one of my travelling companions was explaining to me, when my eyes fell upon a walled inclosure, with an iron-barred gate. Inside it I perceived a house with all the blinds closed, and which I immediately recollect; it was the farmhouse where I had been sheltered. I eagerly pointed it out to my companion, and asked who lived in it.

"'Nobody just now,' replied he.

"'But was it not kept, some years ago, by a farmer and his two sons?'

"'The Turreaus,' said my travelling companion, looking at me; 'did you know them?'

"'I saw them once.'

"He shook his head.

"'Yes, yes!' resumed he; 'for many years they lived there like wolves in their den; they merely knew how to till land, kill game, and drink. The father managed the house, but men living alone, without women to love them, without children to soften them, and without God to make them think of heaven, always turn into wild

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beasts, you see; so one morning the eldest son, who had been drinking too much brandy, would not harness the plow-horses; his father struck him with his whip, and the son, who was mad drunk, shot him dead with his gun.””

16th, p.m.—I have been thinking of the story of the old cashier these two days; it came so opportunely upon the reflections my dream had suggested to me.

Have I not an important lesson to learn from all this?

If our sensations have an incontestable influence upon our judgments, how comes it that we are so little careful of those things which awaken or modify these sensations? The external world is always reflected in us as in a mirror, and fills our minds with pictures which, unconsciously to ourselves, become the germs of our opinions and of our rules of conduct. All the objects which surround us are then, in reality, so many talismans whence good and evil influences are emitted, and it is for us to choose them wisely, so as to create a healthy atmosphere for our minds.

Feeling convinced of this truth, I set about making a survey of my attic.

The first object on which my eyes rest is an old map of the history of the principal monastery in my native province. I had unrolled it with much satisfaction, and placed it on the most conspicuous part of the wall. Why had I given it this place? Ought this sheet of old worm-eaten parchment to be of so much value to me, who am neither an antiquary nor a scholar? Is not its real importance in my sight that one of the abbots who founded it bore my name, and that I shall, perchance,

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be able to make myself a genealogical tree of it for the edification of my visitors? While writing this, I feel my own blushes. Come, down with the map! let us banish it into my deepest drawer.

As I passed my glass, I perceived several visiting cards complacently displayed in the frame. By what chance is it that there are only names that make a show among them? Here is a Polish count—a retired colonel—the deputy of my department. Quick, quick, into the fire with these proofs of vanity! and let us put this card in the handwriting of our office-boy, this direction for cheap dinners, and the receipt of the broker where I bought my last armchair, in their place. These indications of my poverty will serve, as Montaigne says, *mater ma superbe*, and will always make me recollect the modesty in which the dignity of the lowly consists.

I have stopped before the prints hanging upon the wall. This large and smiling Pomona, seated on sheaves of corn, and whose basket is overflowing with fruit, only produces thoughts of joy and plenty; I was looking at her the other day, when I fell asleep denying such a thing as misery. Let us give her as companion this picture of Winter, in which everything tells of sorrow and suffering: one picture will modify the other.

And this Happy Family of Greuze's! What joy in the children's eyes! What sweet repose in the young woman's face! What religious feeling in the grandfather's countenance! May God preserve their happiness to them! but let us hang by its side the picture of

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this mother, who weeps over an empty cradle. Human life has two faces, both of which we must dare to contemplate in their turn.

Let me hide, too, these ridiculous monsters which ornament my chimneypiece. Plato has said that “the beautiful is nothing else than the visible form of the good.” If it is so, the ugly should be the visible form of the evil, and, by constantly beholding it, the mind insensibly deteriorates.

But above all, in order to cherish the feelings of kindness and pity, let me hang at the foot of my bed this affecting picture of the Last Sleep! Never have I been able to look at it without feeling my heart touched.

An old woman, clothed in rags, is lying by a roadside; her stick is at her feet, and her head rests upon a stone; she has fallen asleep; her hands are clasped; murmuring a prayer of her childhood, she sleeps her last sleep, she dreams her last dream!

She sees herself, again a strong and happy child, keeping the sheep on the common, gathering the berries from the hedges, singing, curtsying to passers-by, and making the sign of the cross when the first star appears in the heavens! Happy time, filled with fragrance and sunshine! She wants nothing yet, for she is ignorant of what there is to wish for.

But see her grown up; the time is come for working bravely: she must cut the corn, thresh the wheat, carry the bundles of flowering clover or branches of withered leaves to the farm. If her toil is hard, hope shines like a sun over everything and it wipes the drops of sweat

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away. The growing girl already sees that life is a task, but she still sings as she fulfills it.

By-and-bye the burden becomes heavier; she is a wife, she is a mother! She must economize the bread of to-day, have her eye upon the morrow, take care of the sick, and sustain the feeble; she must act, in short, that part of an earthly Providence, so easy when God gives us his aid, so hard when he forsakes us. She is still strong, but she is anxious; she sings no longer!

Yet a few years, and all is overcast. The husband's health is broken; his wife sees him pine away by the now fireless hearth; cold and hunger finish what sickness had begun; he dies, and his widow sits on the ground by the coffin provided by the charity of others, pressing her two half-naked little ones in her arms. She dreads the future, she weeps, and she droops her head.

At last the future has come; the children are grown up, but they are no longer with her. Her son is fighting under his country's flag, and his sister is gone. Both have been lost to her for a long time—perhaps for ever; and the strong girl, the brave wife, the courageous mother, is henceforth only a poor old beggar-woman, without a family, and without a home! She weeps no more, sorrow has subdued her; she surrenders, and waits for death.

Death, that faithful friend of the wretched, is come: not hideous and with mockery, as superstition represents, but beautiful, smiling, and crowned with stars! The gentle phantom stoops to the beggar; its pale lips

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murmur a few airy words, which announce to her the end of her labors; a peaceful joy comes over the aged beggar-woman, and, leaning on the shoulder of the great Deliverer, she has passed unconsciously from her last earthly sleep to her eternal rest.

Lie there, thou poor way-wearied woman! The leaves will serve thee for a winding-sheet. Night will shed her tears of dew over thee, and the birds will sing sweetly by thy remains. Thy visit here below will not have left more trace than their flight through the air; thy name is already forgotten, and the only legacy thou hast to leave is the hawthorn stick lying forgotten at thy feet!

Well! some one will take it up—some soldier of that great human host which is scattered abroad by misery or by vice; for thou art not an exception, thou art an instance; and under the same sun which shines so pleasantly upon all, in the midst of these flowering vineyards, this ripe corn, and these wealthy cities, entire generations suffer, succeed each other, and still bequeath to each the beggar’s stick!

The sight of this sad picture shall make me more grateful for what God has given me, and more compassionate for those whom he has treated with less indulgence; it shall be a lesson and a subject for reflection for me.

Ah! if we would watch for everything that might improve and instruct us; if the arrangements of our daily life were so disposed as to be a constant school for our minds! but oftenest we take no heed of them. Man is an eternal mystery to himself; his own person is a

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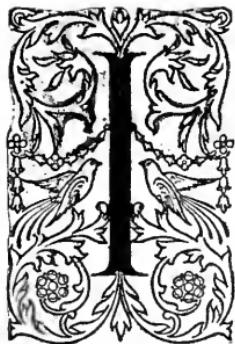
house into which he never enters, and of which he studies the outside alone. Each of us need have continually before him the famous inscription which once instructed Socrates, and which was engraved on the walls of Delphi by an unknown hand:

KNOW THYSELF.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE END OF THE YEAR

*December 30th, P.M.*



WAS in bed, and hardly recovered from the delirious fever which had kept me for so long between life and death. My weakened brain was making efforts to recover its activity; my thoughts, like rays of light struggling through the clouds, were still confused and imperfect; at times I felt a return of the dizziness which made a chaos of all my ideas, and I floated, so to speak, between alternate fits of mental wandering and consciousness.

Sometimes everything seemed plain to me, like the prospect which, from the top of some high mountain, opens before us in clear weather. We distinguish water, woods, villages, cattle, even the cottage perched on the edge of the ravine; then suddenly there comes a gust of wind laden with mist, and all is confused and indistinct.

Thus, yielding to the oscillations of a half-recovered reason, I allowed my mind to follow its various impulses without troubling myself to separate the real from the imaginary; I glided softly from one to the other, and my dreams and waking thoughts succeeded closely upon one another.

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Now, while my mind is wandering in this unsettled state, see, underneath the clock which measures the hours with its loud ticking, a female figure appears before me!

At first sight I saw enough to satisfy me that she was not a daughter of Eve. In her eye was the last flash of an expiring star, and her face had the pallor of an heroic death-struggle. She was dressed in a drapery of a thousand changing colors of the brightest and the most sombre hues, and held a withered garland in her hand.

After having contemplated her for some moments, I asked her name, and what brought her into my attic. Her eyes, which were following the movements of the clock, turned toward me, and she replied:

“You see in me the year which is just drawing to its end; I come to receive your thanks and your farewell.”

I raised myself on my elbow in surprise, which soon gave place to bitter resentment.

“Ah! you want thanks,” cried I; “but first let me know what for?

“When I welcomed your coming, I was still young and vigorous: you have taken from me each day some little of my strength, and you have ended by inflicting an illness upon me; already, thanks to you, my blood is less warm, my muscles less firm, and my feet less agile than before! You have planted the germs of infirmity in my bosom; there, where the summer flowers of life were growing, you have wickedly sown the nettles of old age!

“And, as if it were not enough to weaken my body, you have also diminished the powers of my soul; you

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have extinguished her enthusiasm; she is become more sluggish and more timid. Formerly her eyes took in the whole of mankind in their generous survey; but you have made her nearsighted, and now she hardly sees beyond herself!

“That is what you have done for my spiritual being: then as to my outward existence, see to what grief, neglect, and misery you have reduced it!

“For the many days that the fever has kept me chained to this bed, who has taken care of this home in which I placed all my joy? Shall I not find my closets empty, my bookcase stripped, all my poor treasures lost through negligence or dishonesty? Where are the plants I cultivated, the birds I fed? All are gone! my attic is despoiled, silent and solitary!

“As it is only for the last few moments that I have returned to a consciousness of what surrounds me, I am even ignorant who has nursed me during my long illness! Doubtless some hireling, who will leave when all my means of recompense are exhausted!

“And what will my masters, for whom I am bound to work, have said to my absence? At this time of the year, when business is most pressing, can they have done without me, will they even have tried to do so? Perhaps I am already superseded in the humble situation by which I earned my daily bread! And it is thou—thou alone, wicked daughter of Time—who hast brought all these misfortunes upon me: strength, health, comfort, work—thou hast taken all from me. I have only received outrage and loss from thee, and yet thou darest to claim my gratitude!

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“Ah! die then, since thy day is come; but die despised and cursed; and may I write on thy tomb the epitaph the Arabian poet inscribed upon that of a king:

“*Rejoice, thou passer-by: he whom we have buried here cannot live again.*”

I was wakened by a hand taking mine; and opening my eyes, I recognized the doctor.

After having felt my pulse, he nodded his head, sat down at the foot of the bed, and looked at me, rubbing his nose with his snuffbox. I have since learned that this was a sign of satisfaction with the doctor.

“Well! so we wanted old snub-nose to carry us off?” said M. Lambert, in his half-joking, half-scolding way. “What the deuce of a hurry we were in! It was necessary to hold you back with both arms at least!”

“Then you had given me up, doctor?” asked I, rather alarmed.

“Not at all,” replied the old physician. “We can’t give up what we have not got; and I make it a rule never to have any hope. We are but instruments in the hands of Providence, and each of us should say, with Ambroise Paré: ‘I tend him, God cures him!’”

“May He be blessed then, as well as you,” cried I; “and may my health come back with the new year!”

M. Lambert shrugged his shoulders.

“Begin by asking yourself for it,” resumed he, bluntly. “God has given it you, and it is your own sense, and not chance, that must keep it for you. One would think, to hear people talk, that sickness comes

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upon us like the rain or the sunshine, without one having a word to say in the matter. Before we complain of being ill we should prove that we deserve to be well.”

I was about to smile, but the doctor looked angry.

“Ah! you think that I am joking,” resumed he, raising his voice; “but tell me, then, which of us gives his health the same attention that he gives to his business? Do you economize your strength as you economize your money? Do you avoid excess and imprudence in the one case with the same care as extravagance or foolish speculations in the other? Do you keep as regular accounts of your mode of living as you do of your income? Do you consider every evening what has been wholesome or unwholesome for you, with the same care that you bring to the examination of your expenditure? You may smile; but have you not brought this illness on yourself by a thousand indiscretions? ”

I began to protest against this, and asked him to point out these indiscretions. The old doctor spread out his fingers, and began to reckon upon them one by one.

“*Primo*,” cried he, “want of exercise. You live here like a mouse in a cheese, without air, motion, or change. Consequently, the blood circulates badly, the fluids thicken, the muscles, being inactive, do not claim their share of nutrition, the stomach flags, and the brain grows weary.

“*Secundo*. Irregular food. Caprice is your cook; your stomach a slave who must accept what you give

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it, but who presently takes a sullen revenge, like all slaves.

“*Tertio*. Sitting up late. Instead of using the night for sleep, you spend it in reading; your bedstead is a bookcase, your pillows a desk! At the time when the wearied brain asks for rest, you lead it through these nocturnal orgies, and you are surprised to find it the worse for them the next day.

“*Quarto*. Luxurious habits. Shut up in your attic, you insensibly surround yourself with a thousand effeminate indulgences. You must have list for your door, a blind for your window, a carpet for your feet, an easy-chair stuffed with wool for your back, your fire lit at the first sign of cold, and a shade to your lamp; and thanks to all these precautions, the least draught makes you catch cold, common chairs give you no rest, and you must wear spectacles to support the light of day. You have thought you were acquiring comforts, and you have only contracted infirmities.

“*Quinto*—”

“Ah! enough, enough, doctor!” cried I. “Pray, do not carry your examination farther; do not attach a sense of remorse to each of my pleasures.”

The old doctor rubbed his nose with his snuffbox.

“You see,” said he, more gently, and rising at the same time, “you would escape from the truth. You shrink from inquiry—a proof that you are guilty. *Habemus confitentem reum!* But at least, my friend, do not go on laying the blame on Time, like an old woman.”

Thereupon he again felt my pulse, and took his leave,

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declaring that his function was at an end, and that the rest depended upon myself.

When the doctor was gone, I set about reflecting upon what he had said.

Although his words were too sweeping, they were not the less true in the main. How often we accuse chance of an illness, the origin of which we should seek in ourselves! Perhaps it would have been wiser to let him finish the examination he had begun.

But is there not another of more importance—that which concerns the health of the soul? Am I so sure of having neglected no means of preserving that during the year which is now ending? Have I, as one of God’s soldiers upon earth, kept my courage and my arms efficient? Shall I be ready for the great review of souls which must pass before HIM WHO IS in the dark valley of Jehoshaphat?

Darest thou examine thyself, O my soul! and see how often thou hast erred?

First, thou hast erred through pride! for I have not duly valued the lowly. I have drunk too deeply of the intoxicating wines of genius, and have found no relish in pure water. I have disdained those words which had no other beauty than their sincerity; I have ceased to love men solely because they are men—I have loved them for their endowments; I have contracted the world within the narrow compass of a pantheon, and my sympathy has been awakened by admiration only. The vulgar crowd, which I ought to have followed with a friendly eye because it is composed of my brothers in hope or grief, I have let pass by me with as much

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indifference as if it were a flock of sheep. I am indignant with him who rolls in riches and despises the man poor in worldly wealth; and yet, vain of my trifling knowledge, I despise him who is poor in mind—I scorn the poverty of intellect as others do that of dress; I take credit for a gift which I did not bestow on myself, and turn the favor of fortune into a weapon with which to attack others.

Ah! if, in the worst days of revolutions, ignorance has revolted and raised a cry of hatred against genius, the fault is not alone in the envious malice of ignorance, but comes in part, too, from the contemptuous pride of knowledge.

Alas! I have too completely forgotten the fable of the two sons of the magician of Bagdad.

One of them, struck by an irrevocable decree of destiny, was born blind, while the other enjoyed all the delights of sight. The latter, proud of his own advantages, laughed at his brother's blindness, and disdained him as a companion. One morning the blind boy wished to go out with him.

"To what purpose," said he, "since the gods have put nothing in common between us? For me creation is a stage, where a thousand charming scenes and wonderful actors appear in succession; for you it is only an obscure abyss, at the bottom of which you hear the confused murmur of an invisible world. Continue then alone in your darkness, and leave the pleasures of light to those upon whom the day-star shines."

With these words he went away, and his brother, left alone, began to cry bitterly. His father, who heard

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him, immediately ran to him, and tried to console him by promising to give him whatever he desired.

“Can you give me sight?” asked the child.

“Fate does not permit it,” said the magician.

“Then,” cried the blind boy, eagerly, “I ask you to put out the sun!”

Who knows whether my pride has not provoked the same wish on the part of some one of my brothers who does not see?

But how much oftener have I erred through levity and want of thought! How many resolutions have I taken at random! how many judgments have I pronounced for the sake of a witticism! how many mischiefs have I not done without any sense of my responsibility! The greater part of men harm one another for the sake of doing something. We laugh at the honor of one, and compromise the reputation of another, like an idle man who saunters along a hedgerow, breaking the young branches and destroying the most beautiful flowers.

And, nevertheless, it is by this very thoughtlessness that the fame of some men is created. It rises gradually, like one of those mysterious mounds in barbarous countries, to which a stone is added by every passer-by; each one brings something at random, and adds it as he passes, without being able himself to see whether he is raising a pedestal or a gibbet. Who will dare look behind him, to see his rash judgments held up there to view?

Some time ago I was walking along the edge of the green mound on which the Montmartre telegraph

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stands. Below me, along one of the zigzag paths which wind up the hill, a man and a girl were coming up, and arrested my attention. The man wore a shaggy coat, which gave him some resemblance to a wild beast; and he held a thick stick in his hand, with which he described various strange figures in the air. He spoke very loud, and in a voice which seemed to me convulsed with passion. He raised his eyes every now and then with an expression of savage harshness, and it appeared to me that he was reproaching and threatening the girl, and that she was listening to him with a submissiveness which touched my heart. Two or three times she ventured a few words, doubtless in the attempt to justify herself; but the man in the greatcoat began again immediately with his loud and angry voice, his savage looks, and his threatening evolutions in the air. I followed him with my eyes, vainly endeavoring to catch a word as he passed, until he disappeared behind the hill.

I had evidently just seen one of those domestic tyrants whose sullen tempers are excited by the patience of their victims, and who, though they have the power to become the beneficent gods of a family, choose rather to be their tormentors.

I cursed the unknown savage in my heart, and I felt indignant that these crimes against the sacred peace of home could not be punished as they deserve, when I heard his voice approaching nearer. He had turned the path, and soon appeared before me at the top of the slope.

The first glance, and his first words, explained

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everything to me: in place of what I had taken for the furious tones and terrible looks of an angry man, and the attitude of a frightened victim, I had before me only an honest citizen, who squinted and stuttered, but who was explaining the management of silkworms to his attentive daughter.

I turned homeward, smiling at my mistake; but before I reached my faubourg I saw a crowd running, I heard calls for help, and every finger pointed in the same direction to a distant column of flame. A manufactory had taken fire, and everybody was rushing forward to assist in extinguishing it.

I hesitated. Night was coming on; I felt tired; a favorite book was awaiting me; I thought there would be no want of help, and I went on my way.

Just before I had erred from want of consideration; now it was from selfishness and cowardice.

But what! have I not on a thousand other occasions forgotten the duties which bind us to our fellowmen? Is this the first time I have avoided paying society what I owe it? Have I not always behaved to my companions with injustice, and like the lion? Have I not claimed successively every share? If any one is so ill-advised as to ask me to return some little portion, I get provoked, I am angry, I try to escape from it by every means. How many times, when I have perceived a beggar sitting huddled up at the end of the street, have I not gone out of my way, for fear that compassion would impoverish me by forcing me to be charitable! How often have I doubted the misfortunes of others, that I might with justice harden my heart against them!

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With what satisfaction have I sometimes verified the vices of the poor man, in order to show that his misery is the punishment he deserves!

Oh! let us not go farther—let us not go farther! I interrupted the doctor's examination, but how much sadder is this one! We pity the diseases of the body; we shudder at those of the soul.

I was happily disturbed in my reverie by my neighbor, the old soldier.

Now I think of it, I seem always to have seen, during my fever, the figure of this good old man, sometimes leaning against my bed, and sometimes sitting at his table, surrounded by his sheets of pasteboard.

He has just come in with his glue-pot, his quire of green paper, and his great scissors. I called him by his name; he uttered a joyful exclamation, and came near me.

“Well! so the bullet is found again!” cried he, taking my two hands into the maimed one which was left him; “it has not been without trouble, I can tell you; the campaign has been long enough to win two clasps in. I have seen no few fellows with the fever batter windmills during my hospital days: at Leipsic, I had a neighbor who fancied a chimney was on fire in his stomach, and who was always calling for the fire-engines; but the third day it all went out of itself. But with you it has lasted twenty-eight days—as long as one of the Little Corporal’s campaigns.”

“I am not mistaken then; you were near me?”

“Well! I had only to cross the passage. This left hand has not made you a bad nurse for want of the

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right; but, bah! you did not know what hand gave you drink, and it did not prevent that beggar of a fever from being drowned—for all the world like Poniatowski in the Elster.”

The old soldier began to laugh, and I, feeling too much affected to speak, pressed his hand against my breast. He saw my emotion, and hastened to put an end to it.

“By-the-bye, you know that from to-day you have a right to draw your rations again,” resumed he gayly; “four meals, like the German *meinherrs*—nothing more! The doctor is your house steward.”

“We must find the cook, too,” replied I, with a smile.

“She is found,” said the veteran.

“Who is she?”

“Geneviève.”

“The fruit-woman?”

“While I am talking she is cooking for you, neighbor; and do not fear her sparing either butter or trouble. As long as life and death were fighting for you, the honest woman passed her time in going up and down stairs to learn which way the battle went. And, stay, I am sure this is she.”

In fact we heard steps in the passage, and he went to open the door.

“Oh, well!” continued he, “it is Mother Millot, our portress, another of your good friends, neighbor, and whose poultices I recommend to you. Come in, Mother Millot—come in; we are quite bonny boys this morning, and ready to step a minuet if we had our dancing-shoes.”

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The portress came in, quite delighted. She brought my linen, washed and mended by herself, with a little bottle of Spanish wine, the gift of her sailor son, and kept for great occasions. I would have thanked her, but the good woman imposed silence upon me, under the pretext that the doctor had forbidden me to speak. I saw her arrange everything in my drawers, the neat appearance of which struck me; an attentive hand had evidently been there, and day by day put straight the unavoidable disorder consequent on sickness.

As she finished, Geneviève arrived with my dinner; she was followed by Mother Denis, the milkwoman over the way, who had learned, at the same time, the danger I had been in, and that I was now beginning to be convalescent. The good Savoyard brought me a newlaid egg, which she herself wished to see me eat.

It was necessary to relate minutely all my illness to her. At every detail she uttered loud exclamations; then, when the portress warned her to be less noisy, she excused herself in a whisper. They made a circle around me to see me eat my dinner; each mouthful I took was accompanied by their expressions of satisfaction and thankfulness. Never had the King of France, when he dined in public, excited such admiration among the spectators.

As they were taking the dinner away, my colleague, the old cashier, entered in his turn.

I could not prevent my heart beating as I recognized him. How would the heads of the firm look upon my absence, and what did he come to tell me?

I waited with inexpressible anxiety for him to speak;

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but he sat down by me, took my hand, and began rejoicing over my recovery, without saying a word about our masters. I could not endure this uncertainty any longer.

“And the Messieurs Durmer,” asked I, hesitatingly, “how have they taken—the interruption to my work?”

“There has been no interruption,” replied the old clerk, quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“Each one in the office took a share of your duty; all has gone on as usual, and the Messieurs Durmer have perceived no difference.”

This was too much. After so many instances of affection, this filled up the measure. I could not restrain my tears.

Thus the few services I had been able to do for others had been acknowledged by them a hundred-fold! I had sown a little seed, and every grain had fallen on good ground, and brought forth a whole sheaf. Ah! this completes the lesson the doctor gave me. If it is true that the diseases, whether of the mind or body, are the fruit of our follies and our vices, sympathy and affection are also the rewards of our having done our duty. Every one of us, with God’s help, and within the narrow limits of human capability, himself makes his own disposition, character, and permanent condition.

Everybody is gone; the old soldier has brought me back my flowers and my birds, and they are my only

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companions. The setting sun reddens my half-closed curtains with its last rays. My brain is clear, and my heart lighter. A thin mist floats before my eyes, and I feel myself in that happy state which precedes a refreshing sleep.

Yonder, opposite the bed, the pale goddess in her drapery of a thousand changing colors, and with her withered garland, again appears before me; but this time I hold out my hand to her with a grateful smile.

“Adieu, beloved year! whom I but now unjustly accused. That which I have suffered must not be laid to thee; for thou wast but a tract through which God had marked out my road—a ground where I had reaped the harvest I had sown. I will love thee, thou wayside shelter, for those hours of happiness thou hast seen me enjoy; I will love thee even for the suffering thou hast seen me endure. Neither happiness nor suffering came from thee; but thou hast been the scene for them. Descend again then, in peace, into eternity, and be blest, thou who hast left me experience in the place of youth, sweet memories instead of past time, and gratitude as payment for good offices.”

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## CHAPTER I

### A CHILD OF THE FAUBOURGS



S far back as I can remember I recall living with my father and mother in a house of two stories in the Rue de Château-Landon, near the Barrière des Vertus.

On the ground-floor lodged, all alone, an old-clothes merchant, who followed his calling during the day, returned in the evening, never spoke to anyone, made no noise, and lived as quietly as a dead man in his grave.

Above the clothes-seller dwelt Mother Cauville, an excellent woman, who was a poor widow with three children. While her husband lived all were well supported, but at his death "her legs lacked to carry them," as the good woman said, and it was necessary to go upon her courage. The brave woman, harnessed to a hand-cart, set herself to hawking vegetables through the streets; the elder daughter bought a large basket and peddled the fruits of the season, and the son became a roving chair-mender. The little Rose, then eight years of age, stayed at home and kept house. At first they suffered much misery. They measured the mouth-

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fuls, they blew upon their fingers to warm them, they slept upon straw; but, little by little, the earnings of the mother and the two children had increased; the farthings grew to pieces of fifteen sous; they were able to have a mattress, to light a stove, and enlarge the loaf of bread. Rose, in her spare moments, made sulphur matches, which her sister sold, and knit stockings for all the family. When I quitted the house these brave people had furniture, Sunday clothes, and a credit at the baker's.

The recollection of the Cauvilles has always remained with me as proof of what the least resources can produce when improved by perseverance and hearty goodwill. It is by the sum of little efforts that one reaches great results; each one of our fingers is a little thing, but united they form the hand with which one raises houses and pierces mountains.

The habitation of my parents was above that of Mother Cauville; above us were only the cats and the sparrows.

The better part of my time was passed in chasing this small game or rambling in the faubourg. We were a dozen youngsters, better furnished with appetites than with shoes, who spent our time together in the streets. Everything afforded us amusement: the snow of winter, which was the occasion of great battles; the water in the gutters, which we dammed, turning the street into a pond; the meagre sods growing upon still unoccupied grounds, with which we built forts or mills. In these works, as in our childish plays, I was neither the strongest nor the wisest; but I hated injustice, and this made me the chosen arbiter in all quarrels. The condemned

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party sometimes revenged the decision of the judge by thrashing him; but, far from giving me a distaste for my impartiality, the blows confirmed it; it was like the nail well placed, the more it is struck the deeper it is driven.

The same instinct inclined me to do only that which I believed permissible and to say only that which I knew. I suffered for it more than once, above all in an adventure with the chestnut vender.

He was a peasant who often traversed our quarter with a donkey laden with fruit and nuts, and stopped at the lodging of a fellow countryman who lived opposite our house. Wine-drinking often prolonged his visit, and, grouped before the donkey, we regarded his burden with envious eyes. One day the temptation was too strong. The donkey bore a sack, through a hole in which we could see the fine, glistening chestnuts, which had the appearance of putting themselves at the window to provoke our greediness. The boldest lad winked knowingly, and one proposed enlarging the hole. The thing was deliberated; I was the only one to oppose. As the majority made the law, they proceeded to the execution, when I threw myself before the sack, crying that no one should touch it. I wished to give reasons to support my position, but a fist-blow closed my mouth. I struck back, and a general scuffle resulted, which was my Waterloo. Overwhelmed by numbers I drew, in my downfall, the sack which I defended, and the peasant, whom the noise of the strife had attracted, found me under the feet of the donkey in the midst of his scattered chestnuts. Seeing my adver-

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saries fleeing, he divined what they had wished to do, took me for their accomplice, and, without more enlightenment, set himself to punishing me for the theft which I had prevented. I protested in vain; the vender believed that he avenged his merchandise, and had, otherwise, drunk too much to understand. I escaped from his hands bruised, bloody, and furious.

My companions did not fail to rail at my scruples so badly recompensed; but I had an obstinate will; instead of being discouraged I became still more set in my way. After all, if my bruises were painful they did not make me ashamed, and the mockers at my conduct esteemed me for it. This confirmed me. I have often thought since that in beating me the chestnut-man had rendered me, without knowing it, the service of a friend. Not alone had he instructed me that it is necessary to do right for right's sake, not for recompense, but he had also furnished the occasion for showing a character. I there began, thanks to him, a reputation which later I wished to continue; for if good renown is a recompense it is also a check; the good which others think of us obliges us more often to merit it.

Aside from honesty I had, for the rest, all the defects of a street education. No one took care of me, and I grew, like the wayside herbs, by the grace of God. My mother was occupied all the day with the care of housekeeping, and my father entered the home only in the evening after work. I was for both only a mouth the more to feed. They wished to see me live and not to suffer; their foresight went no farther; it was their manner of loving. Want, which always kept near the

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threshold, sometimes pushed the door and entered, but I do not recall having felt it. When the bread was short they considered my hunger first; and father and mother lived from the rest as they could.

Another recollection of the same period is that of our Sunday walks outside the Barrière. We used to go and sit in some great hall full of people who drank noisily and who often came to blows. I recall still the efforts of my mother and myself to hinder my father from taking part in these quarrels. We often took him away disfigured, and always with great trouble; so these were for me days of torture and fright. One circumstance had rendered them still more odious. I had a little sister named **Henriette**, a blonde little creature as large as your fist, who slept near me in an osier cradle. I was fond of this innocent being, who laughed on seeing me, and extended its little arms. The Sunday visits beyond the Barrière displeased her still more than me; her cries irritated my father, who often gave way to maledictions against her. One day, weary of her tears, he wished to take her; but he was already slightly drunk; the baby slipped from his hands and fell head-first. As we returned they gave her to me to carry. My father rejoiced in having quieted her, and I, who felt her head balancing upon my shoulder, believed she slept. Yet every now and then she uttered a feeble plaint. Reaching home, they put her in bed, and everybody slept; but the next day I was awakened by loud cries. My mother held Henriette upon her knees, while my father regarded them with crossed arms and lowered head. Little sister had died during the night. Without well

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comprehending then what had made her die, I connected her death with our walks outside the Barrière, and this made me hate them still more. After an interruption of some weeks my father wished to resume them, but my mother refused to go, and I was thus delivered.

I was ten years old, and yet no one had thought of giving me any schooling. In this the indifference of my parents was supported by the councils of Mauricet. Mauricet had always been the best friend of my family. A mason, like my father, and from the same province, he had, beyond the influence which old relations give, that which results from a probity without stain, from a proved capacity, and from his well-to-do condition acquired by order and work. They repeated at our house, "Mauricet has said it," as the lawyers repeat, "It is the law." Now Mauricet had a horror of the printed letter.

"What good is it to twist your son in the alphabet?" he often said to my father. "Have I had need of the black book of the schools to make my way? It is neither the pen nor the inkstand, it is the trowel and the mortar-bed, which make the good workman. Wait two years more; then you shall give Peter Henry to me, and, if the devil doesn't interfere, we shall make him take well to the ashlar and the mortar."

My father highly approved; in regard to my mother, she had preferred putting me at school in the hope of seeing me with the little silver cross which the best scholars wore; yet she renounced without much trouble the pride of making me learned; and I should still know how neither to read nor write if the good God had not himself interfered in the matter.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LITTLE SILVER CROSS



UR friend Mauricet not only worked for others as master-journeyman, but for some time he had attempted little enterprises on his own account which had brought him not a little money and stimulated him to further ventures. Some one spoke to him of a job of masonry for a citizen of Versailles who had before employed him. He mentioned it at our house, and my mother counselled him to write to the man; but Mauricet had a decided repugnance for correspondence; he declared that he would like better to wait until Sunday and then go afoot to Versailles to settle the business. Unhappily, another was more diligent; when he returned to us the Monday following he informed us that the man had signed the contract the evening before his visit. He regretted that Mauricet came too late, as he would have accorded the preference to him. It was a profit of some hundreds of francs lost because of the lack of a letter. The master-journeyman detested paper and ink only the more, which, according to him, always gave the advantage to the intriguers over the good workmen. Of course, it is understood that in the eyes of Mauricet the

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good workman was he who knew neither how to read nor write.

But my mother drew from the accident altogether another lesson; she concluded that it was good even for a workman to know how to put "the black upon the white," and she spoke of sending me to school. My father, who had not thought about the matter at all, made no opposition. A whole year passed without my taking either to reading or writing. I always had in my mind what I had heard Friend Mauricet say, and I considered the instruction of the school as a luxury of which, so far as I was concerned, I could have no need. It was necessary for me to value it to understand what service it could be.

We were then, if I recollect rightly, in the year 1806. One evening at the letting-out of school I saw twenty workmen standing before a great placard pasted to a wall. One of them tried to spell it out, but without the ability to decipher even the title. We had among us a little hunchback named Pierrot, who was the wisest of the school and who read books as readily as the others could play upon the sabot. Seeing the silver cross with the tri-colored ribbon which he wore upon his breast, the workmen called him. One of them took him in his arms so that he could see the placard. He set himself to reading it in his little, bird-like voice:

BULLETIN OF THE FRENCH ARMY.

*Victory over the Prussians at Jena.*

It was a recital of the battle, with the history of the five French battalions which the Prussians had not been

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able to cut through, and of the five Prussian battalions which the French cavalry had scattered like a skein of flax. Pierrot read this with as proud an air as if he had been general-in-chief, and the workmen, with their eyes fixed upon him, drank in his words. When he stopped the more hurried cried, "Next! Next!" and the others replied, "Give him time; he must at least catch his breath. The little citizen reads well! Come, my jewel, you were at the charge of Marshal Davoust!" And all were quiet again to hear Pierrot.

The reading finished, other passers arrived. The little hunchback was obliged to begin over again. Of him who had habitually been treated with mockery everybody now spoke with consideration; one would have said that he was of some account for the glorious news that he had made known. Every one was obliged to him; they addressed to him caressing and encouraging words, while on us they imposed silence and kicks; the hunchback had become king to all of us.

This impressed me as the adventure of Mauricet had impressed my mother. Without reasoning the thing, I felt that it was good sometimes to know. The little triumph of Pierrot had given me the taste for the black letter. I cannot say that I took a resolution, but from the next day I became more attentive to the lessons. Some eulogies of M. Saurin, my master, encouraged this good disposition, and my first progress served to give me courage.

At the end of the second year I knew how to read and write. M. Saurin began to give me lessons in arithmetic. These lessons were only accorded to the favor-

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ite scholars. They took them in a certain little room where there was a blackboard, upon which M. Saurin gave his demonstrations. The uninitiated were forbidden to approach this sanctuary. The room with the blackboard was for them like Bluebeard's chamber. M. Saurin taught us the four rules with as much solemnity as if he had instructed us how to make gold, and perhaps, after all, he made us understand a science as precious. I have often thought that the knowledge of arithmetic was the greatest gift which one man could make another. Intelligence is very much, love of work much more, perseverance still more; but without arithmetic all that is like a tool which strikes in the empty air. To calculate is to find the connection there is between effort and result—that is to say, between cause and effect. He who does not calculate goes by chance; in advance he does not know if he takes the best way; afterward he is ignorant if he has taken it. Arithmetic is in industrial things like conscience in things moral: it is only after one has consulted it that he can see clearly and feel easy. Experience has many times proved this which I say, both for others and for myself.

Thanks to the lessons of M. Saurin, I was very soon able to cipher and to resolve all the questions which he placed upon the blackboard. After the departure of Pierrot I was at the head of the class; the little silver cross no more quitted my patched vest. I had done like Napoleon, I was passed emperor for all time to come.

## CHAPTER III

### WIDOW AND ORPHAN



NE winter evening M. Saurin kept me later than usual to solve problems; I did not return home until after night-fall. On arriving I found the door closed! It was the hour that my father habitually returned and when my mother prepared the supper. I could not comprehend what had become of them; I sat down on the stairway to wait for them.

I was there some time when Rose, descending, perceived me. I asked her if she knew why our door was closed; but instead of responding to me she remounted with a frightened look, and I heard her cry on re-entering her apartment, "Peter Henry is there." Some reply was made, then there were hurried whisperings; finally, Mother Cauville appeared at the top of the stairs and invited me in a very friendly voice to come up to her room. She was just sitting down at table with her children, and wished me to partake of their supper. I said that I would wait for my mother.

"She has gone out—on business," said the widow, with a hesitating air; "very likely she will not return soon. Eat and drink, my poor Peter; this you will be sure of."

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I took a place near Rose; everybody kept silence save Mother Cauville, who pressed me to eat; but, without knowing why, I had a pang at the heart. I kept listening to hear any one who might come up the stairway, and I looked every moment toward the door.

The meal ended, they gave me a chair near the fire; the Cauvilles stood around me, but said nothing. This silence, these cares, finished by frightening me; I got up crying that I wished to see my mother.

"Wait, she will come back," said the widow.

I asked where she was.

"Well, then," resumed Mother Cauville, "she is at the hospital."

"Is she sick, then?"

"No; she has gone with your father, who has had an accident at the building-yard."

I declared that I wished to rejoin them, but the vegetable-seller opposed me. She pretended ignorance of which hospital the wounded man had been carried to, and argued, besides, that they would not admit me. I was obliged then to wait. My heart seemed as if in a vise, and I choked. Everybody else seemed affected in the same way. We were seated around the fire, which crackled softly; outside might be heard the rain and the cold wind rattling upon the dilapidated roof of the old house. At this moment a dog set to barking toward the open fields of Pantin, and, without knowing why, I began to weep. Mother Cauville let me alone, saying nothing, as if she did not wish to give me hope in consoling me.

Finally, late in the evening, we heard heavy steps

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upon the stairs. The neighbor and her children ran to the door. I got up trembling and looked toward the entrance; my mother appeared. She was dripping with rain. Her face, spotted with mud and blood, had an expression which I had never seen. She advanced as far as the hearth without saying anything and fell upon a chair. We could see that she wished to speak, for her lips moved, but without utterance.

I threw myself against her and pressed her in my arms. The vegetable-seller finally asked her for news of Jerome.

"Well, then, I have told you," stammered my mother, in a voice almost unintelligible, "the doctor told us immediately—he only had time to recognize me—he gave me his watch—and then—all was over!"

The neighbor wrung her hands; her children looked at each other; as for me, I had not well comprehended; I began crying that I wished to go to the hospital where my father was. At this demand the poor woman straightened herself and, seizing me with both hands, shook me with a kind of insane anger.

"Your father! unhappy one!" she said, "but you have one no more! Understand well, you have one no more!"

I looked at her with fright; this idea could not enter my mind; I continued to repeat that I wished to see my father.

"Do you not understand, then, that he is dead?" interrupted Mother Cauville, harshly.

This enlightened me. I had seen my little sister; I knew what death was. This word connected itself

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in my memory with many frightful images—a winding-sheet, a nail-studded coffin, a hole dug in the earth! I began crying and sobbing. They drew me from my mother and led me to our lodging.

I recall nothing that followed. When I saw my mother the next day she was in bed; she seemed to be better than the evening before, because her paleness had left her; they told me that she had the fever. Friend Mauricet came during the day to see her; but they sent me away while he talked with her. The next day he returned, seeking me for the burial. I had on my best clothes, and they attached a black crape to my hat. There were no more than six or eight to follow the hearse, which surprised me. My father was put into the public graveyard. Mauricet immediately bought a wooden cross, which he planted himself at the place where they had buried him. I returned with red eyes, but with a heart already solaced. I was like most children, with whom grief does not last long.

On leaving the cemetery Friend Mauricet returned with me to my mother's dwelling. At sight of us she burst into tears, for our return announced to her that her companion of twenty years was forever gone; but Mauricet was displeased.

"Now, Madeleine," said he, with a gruffness through which one felt the friendship, "this is not reasonable of you. Jerome is, like you, where the good God has put him! Each one has his duty to do—he to repose and you to work and take courage. Here is a poor lad who has need of you; see if he is not another Jerome; he resembles him already as one sou another."

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He had pushed me toward my mother, who embraced me, sobbing.

"Enough," he resumed, drawing me away at the end of some minutes; "wipe your eyes. Come, close the fountain of your heart. You are a brave one, my widow; the question is to prove it. What do you propose to do now? Let us speak of this; it is the most pressing."

My mother replied that she knew of nothing, that she did not see any means of living, that nothing was left to her but begging at the doors.

"Don't say such stupidities!" exclaimed Mauricet, disapprovingly. "Is this an idea which ought to come to the widow of a workman? If you have hands to beg with you have them to work with, also! One cannot believe that you fear work, you whom I always cite to my daughter and wife. Does any one know better how to economize? Is there a better laundress in the quarter? But is it necessary for me to recall to you the ability of your fingers?"

These praises raised the spirits of my mother a little; she consented to seek with Mauricet for something to do. The mason already had his plans, which he made her accept with the air of leaving the honor to the widow.

It was agreed that she should set up a lodging-house for young men, while I entered a certain building-yard as mason's helper. Mauricet promised to watch over all, and if, in the beginning, the profits did not suffice, he engaged himself, in his slang of the faubourg, "to put a little butter in the spinach."

## CHAPTER IV

### HOLY MONDAY



N making me accept the place of mason's helper Friend Mauricet said to me:

“You have made a beginning, Peter Henry; be a truly good helper if you wish some day to become a true workman. In our trade, you see, it is as in the fashionable world; the best valets make the best masters. Go ahead, then, and if some journeyman hustles you, accept the thing in good part; at your age the shame is not in receiving a kick, but of merititg it.”

The recommendation was not useless, considering the manners and usages of the trade. In all times the mason has had the right of treating his helper paternally—that is to say, of thrashing him for his education. I was put at the orders of a Limousin, who had kept, in this regard, the old traditions. At the least awkwardness the blows rained upon me with a stream of mal-edictions like the thunder and showers of April. I was at first stunned; but I set myself quickly to understand the work and soon “served with precision,” as Friend Mauricet said.

At the end of a month I was the best helper in the

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stone-yard. The Limousin was just enough not to hold ill-will against me. He continued to punish me upon occasion for my awkwardness, but without seeking pretexts; the man was brutal but not wicked. His severity seemed to him a right, and he struck the helper who erred as the judge applies the law, without hate against the condemned.

Although a little rough, my new trade did not displease me. It permitted me to display my strength and agility. Mauricet did not fail to remark them, and they soon gave me a reputation among the journeymen. I applied myself to sustain it with redoubled zeal. Good fame is, at the same time, a recompense and a chain; if it profits one it pledges him; it is like advance money received from the public, and which obliges one to do his duty. I had succeeded in obtaining the good-will of all the workmen in the yard by my good-will. This enabled me to learn the trade more rapidly and with less effort than many of my fellows, some of whom never came to know it at all. The lessons which were refused them, and which they were obliged, so to speak, to steal, were given to me with readiness. I became the student of all the journeymen; each one of them made it a point of honor to teach me something. They permitted me to attempt the easier work and directed my efforts. Mauricet, especially, always had an eye upon me; he spared neither counsel nor encouragement.

"You see, Peter Henry," he repeated to me, continually, "a mason is like a soldier; he should do honor to the regiment of the trowel. The architect is our general

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—he makes the plan of the battle; but it is for us to gain it in bravely working the mortar and the stone, as the troopers over there in Germany work the enemy. The true workman thinks not alone of his account at the baker's. He loves the work of his hands; it is his glory. I have never placed the cap-sheaf upon a gable without feeling something. The houses in which I have had a hand become, as one might say, my children; when I see them they rejoice my eyes; it seems to me that the tenants are a little obliged to me, and I am interested in them. When I speak of this there are those who sneer and regard me as an antediluvian; but the good workmen comprehend me and agree with my sentiment. Believe me, also, little one, if you wish to have your place among the best fellows, put heart in the handle of your trowel. It is only this which can make the master-journeyman.”

These encouragements and my ambition so much hastened my progress that I found myself prepared to take the rank of workman at an age when one usually becomes an apprentice. Such success made me giddy; raised too soon from the dependence which until then I had endured, I abused an authority which I had not learned how to exercise. My helper was the worst-treated in the yard. Mauricet warned me two or three times.

“Take care, youngster,” he said, with his customary familiarity; “you have yet only milk teeth; if you bite too hard you will break them!”

His prophecy was fulfilled to the letter, for one fine day my servant, tired of my bad treatment, rebelled in

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earnest and served me like the plaster which he had the task of preparing. I carried more than a month the marks of this correction, too well merited, but which profited me. Straightened upon this side, I let myself fall upon another.

Some of the journeymen of the stone-yard devoutly kept "Holy Monday," and had tried many times to lead me with them. I resisted, at first, without much trouble. Recollections of the Barrière could not make me laugh. They attacked me with railleries; they declared that I feared being whipped by my mother, that I was not yet weaned, and that the brandy burned my throat. These silly sayings piqued me. I wished to prove that I was no longer a child by conducting myself badly as a man. Drawn outside the Barrière the next pay-day, and supplied with the wages of a fortnight, I remained there until all of it had passed from my own pocket into the wine-seller's drawer.

Sunday and Monday had been employed in this long debauch. I returned home the evening of the second day without hat, covered with mud, and my body bruised by all the walls of the faubourg. My mother, ignorant of what had happened, believed me wounded or dead; she had sought me at the morgue at first, then at the hospital. I found her with Mauricet, who was trying to reassure her. The sight of me eased her quietude, but not her pain. After the first joy of recovering me came the grief of seeing me in such a state. Reproaches succeeded the lamentations. I was so inebriated that I scarcely heard and failed to comprehend. The tone alone informed me that I was being

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reproved. Like most intoxicated persons, I was in a glorious mood, and regarded myself for a quarter of an hour as one of the kings of the world. I answered by imposing silence on the good woman, and declaring that I should henceforth live after my own inclinations. My mother raised her voice, I shouted louder yet, and the quarrel grew bitter, when Friend Mauricet put a stop to it. He declared it was not a time to talk, and made me go to bed without any remark. I slept soundly until the next day.

When I opened my eyes in the morning I recalled all that had passed, and I felt a little shame, mingled with much embarrassment. However, self-conceit hindered my repentance. After all, I was master of the money gained by my work; I could dispose of my time; no one had any right to gainsay it, and I resolved to cut short all remarks.

The thought of my mother alone disturbed me. Wishing to avoid her reproaches, I got up quietly and left without seeing her.

When I arrived at the stone-yard I found the others already at work; but they appeared not to notice me. I set to work in bad enough humor, but with nonchalance. These two days of debauch had taken away from me all taste for my trade. Besides, I felt an inward humiliation which I hid under an air of bravado. I listened to what the other workmen said, always fearing to hear some joke or some unpleasant judgment on my account. When the contractor arrived I feigned not seeing him, and I avoided speaking to him for fear he would ask the cause of my absence the day before. I

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had lost that good conscience which had hitherto made me look the world fearlessly in the face. I felt in my life now a recollection to hide.

Those who had accompanied me to the Barrière had not yet returned; the contractor remarked it.

"It is an infirmity which they have," said the wag of the yard. "When they work, by chance, they swallow so much plaster that at least three days are required to rinse their throats with wine."

All the journeymen set to laughing; but it seemed that there was in this laugh a sort of scorn. I reddened, involuntarily, as if the pleasantry had been made for me. New to the experience, I still felt scruples and remorse.

The day passed sadly enough. The sort of ill-feeling which affected all my members was communicated to my spirit. I was tired, inside and out.

While we worked Friend Mauricet did not say a word to me; but at the hour of going home he came to me and said that we would go together. As he lodged at the other end of Paris I asked him if he had any business in our quarter.

"We shall see," he briefly responded.

I wished to follow my ordinary road; but he took me by other streets without saying why, until we had reached a certain house in the Faubourg St. Martin; there he stopped.

"Do you see the high chimney which rises over the gable of this house, and which I call Jerome's chimney? It is there that your father was killed!"

I trembled violently, and looked at the fatal chimney with a kind of horror mixed with anger.

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"Ah! it was there," I repeated in a tremulous voice.  
"You were there, Mauricet?"

"I was there."

"And how did the thing happen?"

"Not by the fault of the building, nor by the fault of the trade," replied Mauricet. "The scaffold was well-established, the work without danger; but your father had come there on leaving the Barrière. His sight was bleared, his legs were unsteady; he mistook space for a plank, and he was killed without excuse."

I felt the blood mount to my face and my heart beat violently.

"Father Jerome had been a good workman," resumed Mauricet, "if the love of drink had not undone him. Because of long sitting at the wine-seller's he had weakened his strength, his skill, and his mind. But, bah! one only lives once, as some one says; it is necessary to amuse one's self before his burial. If the widows and the orphans are hungry and cold afterward they can go to the Bureau of Charity and blow upon their fingers. Say, is this not your opinion?"

Then he began to sing a Bacchic refrain in vogue at the time:

Let us fill ourselves with good drink.  
When one knows good wine he knows all.

I was humiliated, confused, and I did not know what to say. I well felt that Mauricet did not speak seriously. But to approve him made me ashamed; to contradict him was to condemn myself. I lowered my head without saying anything. Yet he continued to gaze at this cursed gable.

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"Poor Jerome!" resumed Mauricet, changing his voice to a tenderer tone; "if he had not followed bad examples when he was young we should still have him with us. Madeleine would rest her old body, and you—you would have had some one to show you the way. But no, there is nothing left of him, not even a good memory, for one regrets only the good workmen. When the wretched man was crushed upon the pavement, do you know what the sub-contractor said? 'One more drunkard the less! Take him away and sweep the walk.' "

I could not restrain a movement of indignation.

"Well, he was a hard one," continued Mauricet. "He esteemed men only for what they were worth. If death had taken a good workman he would have said, 'This is a pity!' After all, at the bottom every one felt like him, and the proof is the number of friends who followed the body of Jerome to the grave. Those with whom he had caroused turned their backs upon him when he was in his coffin; for these worthless fellows, you see, while they associate together do not love one another."

I listened, meantime, without replying. We had resumed our walk. At the first crossing Mauricet stopped and, pointing to the chimney which stood high above the roofs, "When you wish to resume your life of yesterday," he said, "look at it first from this side, and the wine which you drink shall taste of blood!"

He went his way and left me filled with distress.

I reentered my mother's house much troubled, with-

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out wishing to appear so. I struggled against the lesson that I had received. I revolted internally against feeling so shaken. I swore silently not to recede, and to continue to lead a jovial life. I sought all the more to fortify myself in my impenitence that I expected the reproaches of Madeleine. Prepared to cut them short by a declaration of independence, I entered our poor dwelling with a high head and a deliberate step.

Mother had the supper-table ready and received me as usual. This kindness disconcerted all my resolutions. I felt myself so much distressed with the consciousness of my fault that if I had not made an effort I should have wept. My mother had the air of seeing nothing. (I have since learned that Mauricet gave her the lesson.) She also talked cheerfully, as was her custom, not speaking of the fortnight's wages which I had appropriated for the first time, and appearing not at all disturbed. I went to bed completely disarmed, and my heart stung with remorse. All night long I dreamed I saw my father tottering on the scaffold or being crushed on the pavement. I found myself intoxicated, high upon a cornice, suspended in mid-air and about to fall. When I got up the next day my head was heavy and all my limbs ached.

However, I began working at the ordinary hour. It was another bad day. I was less stunned than the day before, but more sad. To embarrassment had succeeded regret. It was nearly a week before I regained my accustomed vigor and spirits. The first time that Mauricet heard me singing he passed near me and, slapping me on the shoulder, "Contentment has returned

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to the house," he said to me. "That is right, laddie. Guard well the bird there."

"Fear nothing," I responded, laughing; "we shall make him a pretty cage where he shall find something to eat."

"See, above all, that he shall not have too much to drink," replied Mauricet.

We exchanged looks, and he passed, whistling.

Thirty-three years have gone by since that day, and I have never forgotten the promise which I then made to myself. Exposed to all the temptations of intemperance, I have finished by no more caring for them. In the good, as well as in the bad, it is the first steps which decide the road. A habit is sometimes impossible to vanquish, but nearly always easy to avoid.

## CHAPTER V

### MOTHER MADELEINE



INCE I had earned journeyman's wages my home had become more comfortable. We had been able to return to our old lodging. The furnishings which it became necessary to sell at my father's death had been replaced. We had decidedly risen in life, and the neighbors now looked upon us as rich.

All went well until the time when my mother began to complain of her eyesight, which had decreased, little by little, without the dear woman's noticing it, or, rather, without wishing to confess it to herself. She always had a pretext. To-day it was the smoke, to-morrow the mist, the day following a catarrh in the head. It was not until after ten years that she bethought herself that her eyes were at fault. She no longer distinguished minute objects; it was necessary to give up the knife. I began to be disturbed. Mauricet, with whom I counselled, proposed consulting an oculist for whom he had worked and with whom he was acquainted.

We had great trouble to persuade my mother, who, never having been sick, would not believe in doctors. At last, however, she consented.

The oculist was a man of middle age, tall, thin, and

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superbly calm. He looked at the eyes of my mother, said not a word, and wrote a prescription which he gave to me. I very much wished a word to reassure me. but as others were waiting their turn I dared say nothing, and we were obliged to leave as we had come. Yet at the door I perceived that Mauricet had not followed. More bold with the oculist, he had stopped, without doubt to question him. We waited for him some minutes at the bottom of the staircase, where he at last rejoined us.

"Well, then, what did your charlatan say?" asked my mother, who could not pardon the doctor his silent coldness.

"He orders you to eat roast meat and to sleep upon both ears," responded Mauricet.

"But is he sure of the cure?" I demanded.

"Has he not given you a paper?" replied the mason.

"Here it is."

"Then do what he has written there and let the water run under the Pont Neuf."

The accent of Mauricet had a brevity about it which struck me; but I could say nothing at the moment. He took the arm of the dear woman, to whom he told a hundred stories on the way. Never had I seen him so talkative. However, when we had reached home I drew him aside to say that I wished to speak to him.

"I, also," he replied, in a low voice. "When I go out follow me."

My mother had already resumed her duties about the house. Mauricet did not delay his leave-taking, and I followed him.

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As we descended the stairs I uneasily demanded of him what he wished to say to me.

"Wait until we are in the street," he replied.

Arriving there, he walked a few steps without speaking. I could wait no longer.

"In the name of God, Mauricet, what did the oculist say to you?" I demanded, with anguish.

He turned toward me.

"What did he say to me? Your doubts are well founded," he resumed, quickly. "He believes that Mother Madeleine will become blind."

I cried out; but he continued, almost as if in anger:

"Come, come! the question is not of exclamations. Let us talk quietly, like men."

"Blind!" I repeated; "and what will become of her? How shall I find her a companion? Who will care for her?"

"Ah, see here," said Mauricet; "it is clear that something must be done, and that is why I have spoken of the thing. A blind old woman will be a heavy burden for a young man. It is for you to see if you find it too heavy."

I looked at him with a questioning air.

"Well, yes, yes," he continued, in response to my look; "you can discharge yourself from it if you are so disposed. There are retreats for poor, incurable people."

"Where is that?"

"At the hospital."

"Do you want me to put my mother with the beggars?" I exclaimed.

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"Parbleu! Are you going to play the senator?" said Mauricet, without regarding me. "Those higher up than Madeleine go there—true ladies who have had servants and carriages."

"Then it is because they have no sons."

"That may or may not be," continued the mason, shrugging his shoulders. "Sons are under no more obligations than mothers, and there are not a few who carry their babes to the foundling asylum."

"But it isn't mine," I interrupted, quickly. "Mine carried me in her arms while I was little. She nourished me with her milk and with her bread. I have grown like a vine against the wall of her love: and now that the wall has cracks shall I let another sustain it? No, no, Friend Mauricet, you cannot have believed that. If the good woman truly loses her sight, well, there remains mine. Between the two there will only be an eye apiece; but we shall be content."

"You say this from the heart," observed Mauricet; "but it is necessary to reflect with coolness. Consider that it is a clog which you rivet to your feet. Good-by liberty, the economies, marriage even, for it will be a long time before you can earn enough to undertake a family with such a cipher."

"A cipher!" I repeated, scandalized. "You deceive yourself, Mauricet. She will give me contentment and courage. When I was born I was also a cipher for the poor creature, and yet she received me willingly. Be very sure that I know to what I engage myself, and that I have not my head in my heart, as you appear to believe. I find the trial hard, and I would

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have wished not to support it; but, since it has come, let God punish me if I fail to do my duty to the end!"

Here Mauricet, who had not yet looked at me, turned quickly and took me by both hands.

"You are a truly good workman!" he cried, with a brightening face. "I wished to see what was in you and if the foundations were solid. Now I am content. Away with the sham! Let us talk with open hearts."

"But did the oculist really think that there was no remedy?" I asked.

"That is his opinion," replied Mauricet. "Yet, as I left him, he said that perhaps there was hope of delaying the evil if the good woman could live in the country and take the air at will, with the verdure under her eyes."

I interrupted him, saying I would send her there.

"That will be difficult," objected Mauricet; "in living separately your expenses will be almost doubled, and I fear that the cords of your purse are not as long as your good wishes."

But the uncertain hope given by the doctor preoccupied me above all. I sought with Mauricet some way of trying this last possibility. I finally recalled a countrywoman, Mother Riviou, living near Lonjumeau, with whom Madeleine could find, perhaps, without much expense, the life and the care which she needed. I wrote her and received the response which we desired.

It remained to make the invalid herself consent. For this it was necessary for Mauricet to support my prayers with all his eloquence. The dear woman regarded her sojourn in the country as an exile; she wished to think

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about it. At last, however, she yielded, and I went myself to take her.

Mother Riviou received us as old acquaintances. Never a braver woman had eaten the bread of the good God. She comprehended at once the character of her new boarder and promised me to make her contented.

"We pass so much of our life in the fields," she said to me, "that the house shall belong to your mother; she will be able to guide herself as one leads his donkey by bridle and halter. We have too much to do to quarrel with any one's fancies; here each one loves his repose; what one does disturbs no one else. In a month I shall have a young girl who will keep the good woman company and aid her in the housekeeping. She is a true shepherd's-dog, who shall obey your mother's every motion and look; so that she cannot help being pleased among us if the evil one doesn't interfere." I left, completely reassured.

However, the absence of my mother changed everything for me. Now I was alone, obliged to eat at the wine-seller's and to lodge with others. Not having the habits of the other journeymen, I hardly knew what to do with my Sundays and evenings. Mauricet noticed that I appeared sad.

"Take care," he said to me; "it is possible to get good out of all situations. I have been through the experience, my boy, and I know what it is to camp in this way. At the beginning one is perplexed, then wearied. One would like better to lie on straw, than between sheets with everybody: but it is an apprenticeship. Look out that you do not fall into evil, abandoned to yourself and

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obliged to look out for your own interests. Living always with a mother, one is never weaned. When we are little and the good God gives them to us he does us a favor; but when we are become men and are separated from them for a time he also renders us a service. If Madeleine had not gone you would never have known how to sew on your suspender buttons."

I felt the truth of what he said; but I found this new apprenticeship quite as hard as that to which I had submitted for a trade. I began to comprehend that it was more difficult to be a man than to become a workman.

The chamber where I lodged had a dozen beds, occupied by the journeymen belonging to the different building trades, such as masons, carpenters, painters, and locksmiths. Among them was a native of Auvergne already upon the downhill side of life, whom they called Marcotte, and who had formerly worked in our stone-yard. He was a quiet man, always at work without being a great workman, and he spoke only when he was obliged to. Marcotte lived on nuts and radishes, according to the season, and sent all his wages to the country to buy land. He already owned ten acres, and waited until he could make them twelve to retire upon his domain. Then he would build himself a house, keep two cows and a horse, and be a farmer.

This project, followed from the age of twelve years, was almost accomplished; a few months more and he would reach his goal. We sometimes joked the old man, whom they called "the proprietor," but mockeries glided from him like rain from a roof. Wrapped up in his idea, everything else was for him only noise. It

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was in seeing him that I reflected for the first time upon the strength that lay in an active, resolute will. Before this example I had not known what the perseverance of the most feeble can accomplish against the strongest obstacle.

The neighbor of old man Marcotte, in the chamber, had not learned this lesson. He was a journeyman locksmith, young and skilful, but who only worked when he wished, amused himself at will, and never remained in a shop longer than one month, "for fear of being taken for moss," as he said. Everything which inconvenienced him he treated as a superstition. If one spoke of regularity in work, superstition! of honesty toward others, superstition! of kindness toward comrades, superstition! of duty to his relatives, superstition! Faroumont declared loudly that each one lived for himself and ought to regard other men as excellent game to fry when one can catch it. They laughed at his ideas, but there were rumors on his account which pointed to the police-court, and the good workmen held themselves aloof from him.

For my part I avoided him as much as possible, less by reason than repugnance. From the first day he had called me "the rose girl" in sneering at some scruples which I had let him see; and I had responded to the nickname by calling him "the convict," in allusion to the galleys, where his principles, it seemed to me, would lead him. The two names were accepted by the lodgers. Although Faroumont had appeared to take the thing in a laughing way he cherished ill-will toward me and endeavored many times to seek a quarrel, knowing well

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that I was not strong enough to resist him; but I conducted myself with such prudence as to thwart his intentions. Mauricet, witnessing one of his attempts, encouraged me to persist.

"Distrust him as you would the devil," he said to me, seriously. "You know that I am not a child, and that I have coped with some solid fellows, but I should better like a sickness of six months than to have a quarrel with this one."

I thought the same. The intelligence and the wickedness of Faroumont rendered his strength truly formidable; for one of the calamities of our condition—of us workers at the trades—is the blind respect which we have for brute force. By a sort of point of honor the workman is reduced to personal means of defense; he draws glory from not seeking it outside, so that he who can triumph over each one, individually, finds himself in the way of tyrannizing over everybody. If the race of duelists with swords has disappeared in the other classes, that of duelists with fists continues as numerous as ever among us. How often have I seen these ferocious scamps who have crippled brave workmen, or even made widows, and whose villainy gave them a certain consideration! No one dared show his scorn for fear of increasing the list of the victims. Everybody said, "We must take care; he is a wicked rascal!" And they held him in regard. Yet what could he have done against all? Since all are in accord in judging him, how comes it about that they do not agree to execute judgment? Would it then be so difficult for the honest workmen to unite against these furious beasts to chase

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them from their places? But we still have in one respect the idea of savages; like them we take the spirit of brutality and of battle for courage, and we make of that a virtue which redeems all its vices!

The companionship of the lodging-house had made me as intimate with old man Marcotte as the difference in age and tastes would permit. He confided to me his project of soon retiring to the country; he only waited the opportunity for completing the purchase of his farm.

Two or three days after this confidence he entered later than his custom; a part of our companions were already in bed. I had sat up to write to Lonjumeau, and I was on the point of putting out my candle, when I heard the old man climbing the stairs and singing. He opened the door with a noisy assurance which astonished me. Contrary to all his habits, he talked in a loud voice, his eyes glistened and his hat had a swaggering tip over one ear. At the first look I comprehended that "the proprietor" had departed from his habitual sobriety. The wine rendered him talkative, and he seated himself upon the edge of his bed to relate to me the story of the evening. He had just left the carrier who executed the commissions from the country. He had informed him that the piece of land, long time coveted to complete his farm, was finally for sale; the notary only waited for his money.

"Have you the sum?" I asked.

"As you say, my boy," replied Marcotte, lowering his voice and with a mysterious laugh; "pounds and fractions, all is ready."

He looked around him to assure himself that every-

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body slept; then, burying his arm up to the shoulder in his mattress, he drew forth a bag which he showed me with a proud expression.

"See, here it is," he said to me. "There is here a fine bit of land and wherewithal to build a dog-kennel."

He had untwisted the cord which bound the cloth bag and plunged his hand within to touch the pieces; but at the noise of the clinking he trembled, glanced around, made a sign to me to say nothing, and, closing the sack, hid it under his bolster. He was soon in bed and asleep.

I undressed to do the same; but at the moment of extinguishing the candle I turned toward the bed of Faroumont; the journeyman locksmith had his eyes wide open. He closed them quickly under my look. I thought no more about it and went to bed.

I cannot say what troubled my sleep in the midst of the night; I awoke with a start. The moon shone through the curtainless windows and threw a very clear light from our side. I found myself facing the bed of "the convict;" it was empty! I raised myself upon my shoulder to see better. Doubt was impossible; Faroumont had got up! At the same moment I heard the creaking of a floor-board at my right; I turned my head. A shadow suddenly dropped and had the appearance of hiding itself under the bed of Father Martotte. I rubbed my eyes to assure myself that I was not dreaming, and I looked again. Nothing could be seen; all had become silent. I lay down, keeping my eyes half open. A quarter of an hour passed and my eyelids began to close for good, when a new creaking

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of the boards made me open them. I only had time to see Faroumont get into bed and draw the clothes over him. No suspicions came to me at the moment, and I went to sleep.

Exclamations, mingled with tears and groans, rudely interrupted my sleep. I jumped up with a bound; the day began to break, and I perceived the Auvergnat tearing his hair before his tumbled bed. All the chamber companions were sitting up in bed.

"What is the matter?" demanded many voices.

"Some one has stolen his money!" others responded.

"Yes, stolen this night!" repeated Marcotte, with a despair which rendered him foolish; "yesterday it was there. I touched it. I had it under my head when I went to sleep. The robber who took it is here!"

A sudden recollection enlightened me. I turned toward "the convict;" he was the only one who had the appearance of sleeping in the midst of all this tumult. I quickly considered my position. I was probably the only one who had knowledge of the theft. If I kept silence the Auvergnat would lose the sum laboriously saved and which would realize the hopes pursued during forty years. If I spoke, on the contrary, I could force "the convict" to a restitution, but I should expose myself to his vengeance! In spite of the danger of the choice my deliberation was short. I extended my hand toward the Auvergnat and drew him toward me.

"Calm yourself, Father Marcotte," I cried; "your money is not lost."

"What is that you say?" cried the old workman,

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whose face had a frenzied look. "You know where the bag is! Wretch, is it you who have taken it?"

"Come, you are a fool!" I angrily said to him.

"Where is it, then? where is it?" he began to cry, looking at me.

I turned toward Faroumont.

"See here, 'Convict,' the laugh has gone far enough; your joke will give 'the proprietor' the jaundice. Give him back his money, quickly."

Although he had his eyes shut, his face changed color, which proved to me that he had heard. Marcotte threw himself upon him, like a dog who shakes his prey, to reclaim his coins. Faroumont played well enough the man who awakes, and asked what they wanted; but the cries of the Auvergnat made him understand too quickly to give him time to prepare any evasion. I insisted with resolution, representing the taking of the bag as a bad joke played upon Father Marcotte with the intention of disturbing him. "The convict" was obliged to give back the money, repeating that he had wished to play a trick; yet he read upon all faces without trouble that they knew how to take him. Every one hastily dressed and left without speaking. He alone affected not to hurry, and made his toilet whistling. But when I passed before his bed he cast at me a look of malignant rage which made me tremble from head to foot. Henceforth, I was sure of having a deadly enemy.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ENEMY STRIKES



NE day Mauricet said to me, "I have near Berny a debtor who failed last year, but who has come to the surface again. I must go and assure myself of the phenomenon and fish out, if possible, my hundred crowns. Take the wagon with me Saturday evening. You can go as far as Lonjumeau to see Madeleine, and I will rejoin you the next day at the Bois Riant."

The thing was agreed. I had only visited my mother twice since her departure, and the last time I had found her almost completely blind, otherwise better than ever and in fine spirits. But this was three months ago, and work had since always kept me at the stone-yard.

When I reached Lonjumeau the day was drawing to its close. I took the road which led to the house of Mother Riviou; but they had cut the trees, built inclosures, and I no more recognized the way. After having gone astray in two or three footpaths I looked around me for some one who could set me in the right direction. The nearest house was quite distant, and I did not notice at first that, for the moment, the fields were deserted. Suddenly I heard some one singing.

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I recognized the refrain of an old roundel which in my child hood I had often heard my mother sing. I stopped, surprised and pleased. It was the first time I had heard this air for fifteen years. It seemed to me that I had become a child again and that I heard Madeleine restored to youth. In fact, although the voice was strong and fresh, it recalled that of my mother. There was the same manner of throwing the sounds to the wind with a gentleness tinged a little with sadness, as I have since heard the shepherdesses of Burgundy and Champagne. I approached the singer, who was busy taking down white linen from a clothes-line. I found a girl with pleasing countenance who looked me full in the face when I asked the road to the Bois Riant, and who then began laughing.

“I will wager that you are Madeleine’s son,” she said to me.

I looked at her in my turn, laughing.

“And I will wager that you are the young girl that Mother Riviou expected,” I responded.

“They call you Peter Henry?”

“And you Geneviève?”

“Well, then, here is an unexpected meeting.”

“As if we recognized each other without ever having seen one another!”

We broke again into laughter, and the explanations began.

I learned that my mother had completely lost her sight, but was unwilling to admit it. For the rest Geneviève declared to me that she was braver than all the young people in the house and always sang like a bird.

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"Did she teach you the refrain which you have just sung?" I asked.

"Ah, you have heard me?" she replied. "Yes, yes; the good Madeleine taught me all her old songs. She said that they would help me to lull my children or those of others."

While talking she hastened to gather her linen. I aided her in making a bundle, which I took upon my shoulder.

"Well, then, so I have a servant!" she said, gayly.

And, as I told her that it was right for the son to repay that which she did for the mother, she began to speak to me of Madeleine with so much friendship that when we reached the Bois Riant I had already declared my obligation to her from the bottom of my heart.

Mother, who was at the door, recognized my voice, and did not omit to say that she had seen me. Since the darkness of night had shut her in, all her pride lay in not appearing blind. Geneviève aided her without having the appearance of it. She had surrounded the house, outside and in, with a thick cord which formed a leading-string and directed the blind one. A knot served to inform her when she approached a door, a piece of furniture, or a step. A rattle, shaken by the wind, indicated to her the location of the well. Recognizing signs had likewise been placed in the garden-paths. Thanks to Geneviève, in short, Bois Riant was a veritable topographical chart which one could read by feeling the way. The dear woman was always moving about, found everything because they had put everything under her hand, and boasted of it each time as if

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it were a proof of her clear sight. Everybody in the house respected her error and felt an innocent pleasure in keeping up the deception. She was like a spoiled child there, who made all smile and appeared welcome.

Mauricet, who had rejoined me according to his promise, understood immediately the position which Madeleine held by the kindness of her hostess.

"You have not always had your due in comfort and happiness," he said to her, "but it seems to me that now the arrears are being made up to you."

"The country is certainly agreeable," replied the good woman, who did not like to avow too loudly her contentment.

"Yes," replied Mauricet; "but these are nice people who make the country so pleasant, and you have fallen here upon a colony of Christians of a kind not too common."

"I do not complain," observed Madeleine.

"And you are right," continued the master-mason. "These good hearts have made up to you that which chance has taken away. That is why I advise you to thank the ailment which has brought you so many servants and friends. If you still had your eyes——"

"What! what! my eyes!" impatiently interrupted the old mother. "Do you imagine, by chance, that I am blind?"

"It is true—you are cured," replied Mauricet, smiling.

"And the proof is that I see you," continued Madeleine, who heard the noise of the forks. "You are at table with Peter Henry. Ah, ah! just now you have

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asked for bread, and you have cut it. Ah, ah, ah! there is nothing which escapes me, and there are still more than one with the eyes of fifteen years who could not do that which I do here."

Mother Riviou came to the support of what Madeleine said by reporting all that she left to her care in the house. The excellent woman had comprehended that for the infirm person who still retains courage the hardest trial is the feeling of uselessness. Geneviève outdid her mistress. When we were on the way back Mauricet remarked to me this good understanding of all the family to make Madeleine contented.

"They say, though, that the world is wicked," he added, with warmth; "that the good people have become, like white blackbirds, impossible to find; but those who say so, you see, do not seek for them, and, more often, do not care to. For my part, I have never passed a day without receiving from some one a good word or a good service. Unhappily, there are people who only make account of the evil done them and who receive the good as a delayed payment. It is almost always because one is too content with himself that he is discontented with everybody else."

Some months passed without anything special happening. I made many journeys to the Bois Riant, and Geneviève often brought me news of the old mother. The excellent girl came to Paris as often as she could to see her nephew Robert, placed by her in apprenticeship. Robert was then seventeen years old, and worked in a shop where imitation jewelry was made, but with the airs of the son of a well-to-do family. His master,

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whom I went to see one day on behalf of Geneviève, declared to me that he would never become more than a bungler who makes threepenny trash.

"He wishes to be a perfumed fop," he said to me; "but he has not the heart nor the hands to work."

In truth, Monsieur Robert resembled rather a senator's son than a jeweler's apprentice. Geneviève gave him her last sou, and when they blamed her she always told how her brother had recommended the child to her on his deathbed, how she had promised to be everything to him, and then, when the great tears came into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, no one had the heart to say anything more. M. Robert knew her weakness and did not fail to abuse it. He had a pretty little pink face, the white hands and soft voice of a young girl. One would have said that he was a lamb to be led with a ribbon; but in reality nothing could turn him, against his will, and a mad dog had been more easy to lead. I afterward came to know this to my great damage. For the time our intercourse was limited to short conversations. It appeared to me that the little nephew was not enchanted with the acquaintance of his aunt. Indeed, our friendships and our occupations were far removed from each other. M. Robert sang romantic songs, made the rounds of the restaurants, and frequented the balls at night.

As for me, I lived by myself more than ever. The affair with Faroumont had intensified my distaste for the lodging-house, and I had rented a little room under the roofs. A chair, a trunk, a cot-bed formed all my movables; but at least I was alone. The space com-

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prised between the four walls belonged only to me. They came not, as in the lodging-house, to breathe my air, trouble my quiet, interrupt my song or my sleep. I was master of that which surrounded me, and that is the only means of being master of one's self. This, at first, appeared to me so good that I only thought of enjoying it. I was like a shivering man who, once buried in the bedclothes, is loath to leave them. I doted upon my new liberty, and I no more quitted my mansard after work-hours. Mauricet complained two or three times of seeing me no more.

"You are getting in the habit of living on the sly," he said to me. "In the world, as in the army, you see, it is good to be elbowed a little by your neighbor. You are too young to turn snail and withdraw yourself into a shell. Come and see your friends. It is healthy for the heart to take the air."

I had responded nothing; only I continued to cling to my ways. I might have been able to utilize this kind of retreat by resuming my interrupted studies; but no one urged me, and I did not feel the taste for it. I can hardly say what passed within me. I was like one benumbed in my supineness. I rested entire hours without thinking precisely of anything, but going from one thing to another like a man who strolls without aim. I had need of a shaking to draw me out from this waking sleep. The malice of Faroumont prepared one for me upon which I had not counted.

We had not seen each other for many months, when I encountered him at a building we were completing in the Rue du Cherche Midi. He came to place the great

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irons of the timber-work. In recognizing me he had interrupted his work with a wicked laugh.

"Well, then, cursed dog, so you are botching here!" he demanded, with his usual insolence.

I responded briefly in mounting a window, cut through as an afterthought, which I had come to finish.

"Ah! the scaffold is for you!" he said, and his glance turned toward the plank which hung from the height of the gable. I went below and left my vest and lunch-basket; then I climbed toward the new window. The scaffold was strongly suspended by two ropes that I had myself attached to the timbering; but hardly had I placed my feet upon it when the evil face of "the convict" showed itself above between the joists; at the same instant a cord was unknotted, the plank swung, and I was thrown from a height of forty feet upon the rubbish below.

I cannot say how long a time I remained senseless; the pain brought me to consciousness at the moment they wished to move me. It seemed to me that the earth on which I was extended made a part of myself, and that they could not take me away from it without tearing me. Some comrades went to look for a doctor and a stretcher, while the others, among whom was Faroumont, continued to surround me. I suffered cruelly, but it seemed that my wounds were not mortal.

The doctor, who arrived soon after, said nothing. He gave me some preliminary attentions and had me put upon the stretcher and carried to the hospital.

I recall only confusedly what passed for some days. My first distinct recollection was the visit of Mauricet.

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He informed me that I had lain there a week; that they had despaired of my life, and that now the head doctor would answer for it. The brave man was rejoiced at the news, and yet a little angry at me. When he had asked the cause of the accident they had told him of a cord badly tied, and he reproached me energetically for my negligence. I justified myself without trouble by relating to him what had passed. He recoiled and smote his hands together.

"Here is the key to the charade!" he exclaimed. "Name the club and I would not doubt! Since 'the convict' was there one can wager that the devil would be mixed in it. Have you already spoken of it to any one?"

"To no one."

"And there was no witness?"

"We were alone at the top of the building."

"Then, hush! Not a word!" he said, after a moment's reflection. "Accusing an enemy without proof will not rid you of him, but will envenom him. If you say nothing 'the convict' will, perhaps, consider your account squared and trouble you no more, while in talking about it you will oblige him to begin again. What has happened to you has happened to many others in our condition. I myself have made a false step of two stories by the malice of a companion who owed me forty crowns of which he hoped thus to acquit himself. There were only we two who knew the thing; I whispered not a word. I let time do justice to the rascal, and six months after two of his fellows clubbed him like a dog to steal thirty sous from him."

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I comprehended the prudence of Mauricet's advice, and yet I submitted myself to it only with repugnance.

My fall kept me more than two months at the hospital. I was desperate sometimes, the cure was so slow; but I had a neighbor who gave me courage.

He was a poor old fellow, bent with suffering, who called himself, I believe, Pariset. They only called him here by the number of his bed, which was twelve. This bed had already received him thrice for three long sicknesses, and was thus become in some sort his property. "Number Twelve" was known by the doctor-in-chief, the students, and the attendants. Never a gentler creature walked beneath the heavens. When I say walked it was so no more, alas! for the brave man that was only a recollection! For nearly two years he had lost almost completely the use of his limbs. Still, in the mean time he lived by copying law-papers. He was not much disconcerted, he said, and he had continued to draw up his lists on the stamped paper. A little later the paralysis attacked the right arm; he then practised writing with his left hand; but the evil grew; it was necessary to carry him to the hospital, where he had had the happiness of finding his own bed again free; and this had almost consoled him.

"Bad luck is only for a time," he said on this occasion; "every day has a to-morrow."

Old Number Twelve had taken possession of his bed with emotion. The hospital, where staying seems so hard to some people, was for him a house of pleasure. He found there everything to his liking. His admiration for the least comforts proved what privations he

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had until then supported. He went into ecstasies over the cleanliness of the linen, the whiteness of the bread and the richness of the soups; and I was no more astonished when I was told that for twenty years he had lived upon army-bread, herb soup, and white cheese. He could not enough praise the munificence of the nation which had opened such retreats for the sick poor. Besides, his gratitude did not stop there. It embraced all. To hear him one would suppose that God had for him particular favor; men showed themselves full of kindness, and things always turned to his advantage. As the doctor said, Number Twelve had "the fatuity of happiness;" but this fatuity only gave us esteem for the brave man and encouragement for ourselves.

I believe I see him yet, sitting up in bed with his little nightcap of black silk, his spectacles, and the old volume of verse which he ceased not to read. His bed received in the morning the first rays of the sun, and he never saw them without rejoicing and thanking God. To see his gratitude one would have said that the sun arose especially for him. He kept regularly informed of the progress of my recovery, and always found something to say to give me patience. Of that he was himself a living example which said more than words. When I saw this poor body without movement, those distorted limbs, and above that smiling face, I had neither the courage to be impatient nor to complain.

"It is a bad moment to pass," he said at each crisis; "the solace will soon come; every day has a to-morrow."

This was the thought of Number Twelve, and he

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returned to it ceaselessly. Mauricet, who in coming to see me came to know him, never passed before his bed without saluting him.

"He is a saint," he said to me; "but he gains paradise not alone for himself, he makes others gain it, too. Such men ought to be placed on the top of a column, to be seen by everybody. When one looks at them it makes him ashamed of being happy, and that gives one the wish to merit it."

Toward the end of my stay at the hospital the strength of poor Number Twelve diminished rapidly. He lost at first all movement, then his tongue itself became confused. Finally only the eyes were left, which still smiled at us. One morning it appeared to me that his eyes were dimmer. I got up and approached to ask him if he wished to drink; he made a movement of the eyelids which thanked me, and at this moment the first ray of the rising sun gleamed upon his bed. Then his eyes brightened, like a light which sparkles before going out; he had the appearance of saluting this last gift of the good God. Then I saw his head fall back on one side; his brave heart had ceased to beat, and there were no more to-days for him; he had begun the eternal to-morrow.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE GREAT CONTRACTOR



N leaving the hospital I resumed my work, but slowly; I had no longer as much strength as formerly, nor, above all, so much ardor. This long repose seemed to have mixed water with my blood. I was, besides, so well cured of my ambition by the example of the old copyist that I tranquilly awaited the bread of each day without troubling myself whether it should be black or white. Mauricet became impatient at my apathy.

“It isn’t necessary to exaggerate things,” he said; “once the soup is made, good children eat it as it is; but while it is making they endeavor to enrich it. After all, we are no more at nurse! it is not for Providence to cook our food for us; each one ought to lend a hand. The wise thing for a fellow who has his four members is not to live like a paralytic, but by serving himself the best he can.”

I did not argue with him; my hands merely continued to work, my heart was in it no more. I should not have been able myself to say why. Nothing in this state displeased me, neither pleased me. My courage simply slept. An opportunity was necessary to awaken it.

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I went one day with Mauricet to the dwelling of one of the greatest contractors in Paris for some instruction asked for by the master-mason, which, under his dictation I had put in writing. The contractor was not in his office; so they made us go through many rooms to join him in the garden. There were everywhere carpets of many colors, furniture with gilded feet, tapestry of silk and velvet curtains. Never had I seen anything like it; my eyes opened widely, and I walked upon my tiptoes for fear of crushing the flowers of the carpet. Mauricet glanced at me sidewise.

"Well, then, how do you find the house?" he asked, with a sly air. "Does it appear to you handsome and substantial enough?"

I replied that the house had the appearance of that of a prince.

"Prince of the trowel and the square," responded my companion. "He has three other houses in Paris, without speaking of a country house."

I said nothing at the moment; all this opulence stirred something unpleasant within me. In seeing so much velvet and silk I looked at myself, I know not why, and I was ashamed to be so badly dressed. But in my shame there was discontent; I felt disposed to hate the master of all these riches for having made me remark my poverty. Mauricet, who suspected nothing, continued to detail the beauties of the dwelling. I listened with impatience; my heart beat, the blood mounted to my face, my eyes could not stop looking, and the more I saw the more I became exasperated. My ambition, which had slept for some time, awakened, but through envy!

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We had halted in the best salon while the domestic sought his master. Mauricet all at once pointed out to me an ugly little portrait hung in the midst of large pictures richly framed. It represented a workman in his vest, holding in one hand his pipe and in the other a compass.

"Behold the gentleman," the mason said to me.

"Has he been a workman, then?" I asked.

"Like you and me," replied Mauricet; "and you see that he is not ashamed of it."

I looked at the frame of black wood, then at the rich furniture, as if my mind sought the transition from one to the other.

"Ah, this troubles your reason," resumed the mason, laughing; "you seek the ladder which has been able to land him here from the height of his scaffold. But not everybody knows how to serve himself well, you see; in wishing to take it, more than one has lacked the advantages; it is necessary to have wrists and cleverness."

I observed that above all it was necessary to have the chance, that all were happy or unhappy in the world, and that the individual counted for nothing in achieving success. "For example, Friend Mauricet," I sharply added, "why have you not a hotel as well as he who dwells here? Are you less meritorious or less brave? If he has succeeded better than you is it not all a stupid story of chance?"

Mauricet fastened his eye upon me.

"You say this for me, but it is of yourself that you think, sonny," he slyly replied.

"It is all the same," I said, a little vexed at having

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my thought divined. "I don't pass for a bad workman; if it only sufficed to do one's duty I also should ride in a carriage."

"And is it a manner of going about which would become you?" added my companion, ironically.

"Why not? Everybody likes better to save his legs than those of horses; but have no fear that I shall reach that; it is down here, you see, as formerly with the noble families, all for the oldest, nothing for the younger ones and we are the younger ones, we others."

"It is true, however," murmured the master-journeyman, who became thoughtful.

"And there is nothing to say," I continued. "Since it is agreed to, it is just! It is not necessary to disturb the world! Only, you see, it makes my blood boil when I look at the share of each one. Whence comes it that this man here lodges in a palace while others perch in pigeon-houses? Why is it that these carpets, these silks, these velvets, belong to him rather than to us?"

"Because I have earned them," some one interrupted, bluntly.

I started; the contractor was behind us in broidered slippers and dressing-gown! He was a little gray man, but with a strong figure and a commanding voice.

"Ah! it appears that you are a reasoner," he continued, looking at me through half-shut eyes. "You are jealous of me. You ask by what right my house belongs to me rather than to you. Well, then, you shall know! Come!"

He had made a movement toward an interior door. I hesitated to follow him. He turned toward me.

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"Are you afraid?" he demanded, in a tone which made me red to the eyes.

"Let the gentleman show me the way," I replied, almost impudently.

He conducted us into an office, in the midst of which stood a long table covered with inkcups, brushes, rulers, and compasses. Upon the walls hung colored plans representing all the details of a building. Here and there upon stands might be seen little models of staircases, or timber-work, magnetic compasses, graphometers, with other instruments, of the use of which I was ignorant. An enormous case with labelled compartments occupied the end of the room, and upon a bureau were heaped memoranda and estimates. The contractor stopped before the large table and showed me a color-cup.

"Here is a plan to modify," he said. "They wish to narrow the building by three metres, but without diminishing the number of chambers, and it is necessary to find a place for the staircase. Sit down and make me a sketch of the thing."

I looked at him with surprise, and observed that I did not know how to design.

"Then examine for me this estimate," he resumed, taking a bundle of papers from his bureau; "there are three hundred and twelve articles to discuss."

I responded that I was not well enough informed in such work to discuss prices or to verify measurements.

"You at least can tell me," continued the contractor, "what are the formalities to fulfil for the three houses which I am going to build; you know the rules of build-

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ing inspection, the obligations and rights with regard to neighbors?"

I quickly interrupted him, saying that I was not a lawyer.

"And you are neither a banker," resumed the gentleman; "you are ignorant, without doubt, in what language it is necessary to draw up the terms of payment, what is the average time needful to sell in, what interest one ought to draw from his capital not to become bankrupt. As you are not a trader, you would be very much embarrassed in naming the sources of the best materials, of choosing the best time for buying them, the most economical means of transporting them. As you are not a mechanic, it is useless for me to inquire if the crane, of which you see the model there, yields its force with the highest economy. As you are not a mathematician, you would vainly attempt to judge this new system of bridge-building which I am to apply on the lower Seine. Finally, as you know nothing except what a thousand other journeymen know, you are only good as they are, to handle the trowel and the hammer!"

I was completely disconcerted, and I twirled my hat without responding.

"Do you understand now why I dwell in a great house while you live in an attic?" resumed the contractor, raising his voice. "It is because I have taken the trouble; it is because I have informed myself of all that which you have neglected to know; it is because of my hard study and strong will that I have become a general while you remain among the conscripts! By what right, then, do you demand the same advantages

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as your superiors? Ought society not to recompense each one according to the services he renders? If you wish it to treat you like me, do what I have done; scrimp your bread to buy books; pass the day working and the night studying; watch everywhere for instruction as the merchant watches for a profit, and when you shall show that nothing discourages you, when you know things and men, then, if you remain in your attic, come and complain and I will listen to you."

The contractor spoke with much animation, and finished by being a little angry. Still, I answered nothing, his reasons had left me speechless. Mauricet, who saw my embarrassment, attempted some words to justify me, and then came to the subject of our visit. The gentleman examined my note, asked some explanations, then took leave of us. But at the moment I was passing the door he recalled me.

"Remember what I have told you, comrade," he resumed, with familiar good-nature, "and instead of having envy try to have a little honest ambition. Do not lose your time fuming against those who are higher up; work, rather, to spin a cord to join them. If I can ever aid you, you have only to say the word and I will lend you the first bit of hemp!"

I thanked him very briefly and hastened to leave. When we were in the street Mauricet broke into laughter.

"Well, well! Here is a humiliation for a wise man like you!" he exclaimed. "Wasn't he proud of having nonplussed you?"

And as he saw that I made a movement of impa-

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tience, "Come now, are you going to get angry over such a farce?" he added, in a friendly way, "The gentleman has pleaded his cause; it is just, too; but if I do not keep a carriage I know one when I see it. A millionaire, you see, is made neither with the compass nor with the drawing-pen."

"And with what, then?" I asked.

"With money!"

I was this time of the opinion of the master-workman; but in spite of my vexation the contractor's lesson had struck home. When I regained my coolness I came to think that reason was altogether on his side. This episode had given my mind a wholesome shake. I resumed my former activity. Convinced of the necessity of instruction, I recovered my taste for study. The difficulty was to procure the means. Although it was a little painful to return to the contractor, whose recollection of me might be unpleasant, I decided to recall to him his proposition to aid me. He received me well, informed himself of what I knew, and sent me to a surveyor whom he employed. He admitted me gratuitously into an evening class to which some young people came to be instructed in geometry and drawing.

I made myself remarked at first only for stupidity and awkwardness. It was always necessary to explain to me twice what the others comprehended at the first statement; my hand, used to lifting stone, pierced the paper or crushed the crayons. I was very far behind the lowest pupil! Yet, little by little, by the force of perseverance the distance decreased and I slowly reached the average level.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MOTHER'S LAST GIFT



Y life tranquilly passed between work at the stone-yard and that of the class. From time to time I went to see my mother at Lonjumeau, and Geneviève brought me news of her. For some months the strength of the blind woman had sensibly decreased; she seldom left her easy-chair, and her mind was not clear. Mauricet was struck by it as well as myself.

“The distaff is tangled,” he said to me, with his customary curtness; “beware the end of the skein!”

I repulsed this sinister prediction with a sort of anger.

“What! what!” resumed the master-workman, “do you think the thing is more a smiling matter to me than to you? But the future is like men; it is always necessary to look it in the face. Do you not see that there is no benefit in closing the eyes so as not to see the evil which must come? It is beautiful to love one another, my poor child, but one day or another we must part; so much the better for those who leave first.”

“And why think in advance of these cruel separations?” I asked.

“Why?” repeated Mauricet. “So as not to be taken

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by surprise, my little one; to strengthen the heart and to conduct one's self like a man when the moment comes! In life, you see, the question is not to play at hide-and-seek with truth; brave people lie neither to others nor to themselves. Besides," he added, with feeling, "think of death; it is always wholesome! Whether one goes or sees another go, one wishes to leave a good memory with those who go or with those who remain, and he becomes better. Now that you are forewarned I think you will occupy yourself more with Madeleine, and that you will have a very pleasant evening after so wretched a day."

Mauricet spoke truly; his warning had resulted in making me return oftener to the farm and recalling to me more constantly my duty. At each visit I carried to my mother what I knew would please her taste, and she thanked me in embracing me as she had never done before. Perhaps, also, she felt her life ebbing, and she clung with the more affection to those whom she was so soon to leave.

"You wish to make me thank the good God for being old!" she said to me at every new care I took of her.

Then she began to talk of her youth, of the first years of her married life, of my childhood. She recalled all that I had done, all that I had said from the day of my birth; it was for her the history of the world. Geneviève listened as attentively as if she had recounted the life of Napoleon. Always watchful, always singing, she brought with her an atmosphere of cheerfulness. Her blind mistress scolded her, but in a tone which seemed to say that it was only to occupy myself with her, and

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when we were alone she would repeat, "She is the youngest daughter of the good God!" Geneviève, who heard her sometimes, never appeared to do so, in order to leave the good woman the pleasure of grumbling.

However, at my last visit she seemed troubled.

"Mother Madeleine gets no better," she said to me at the moment of my departure.

"Alas! my God, I have seen it!" I replied; "but she pretends not to suffer, and refuses to see a doctor."

"Perhaps she is right," said the young girl; "that would only sadden her."

We exchanged a sigh, and I left with a pang at my heart.

The next day I was at a new building upon the highest scaffolding, when I heard myself called. I looked down and my heart stopped beating; it was Geneviève.

"How does mother do?" I cried to her.

"Badly," she responded, in an altered voice.

In an instant I had descended.

"She wishes to see you," continued Geneviève, quickly; "come immediately; the doctor said that time pressed."

We left at once. Never had the road appeared so long. It seemed to me that the horses travelled slower, that the driver stopped oftener. I should have liked to know the exact state of the old mother, but I dared not question Geneviève. We at last arrived at Lonjumeau. I took the way to the farm, almost running. Mother Riviou was not in the fields according to her habit; I saw her at the door with an air of waiting. This appeared to me a bad sign. She cried out on see-

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ing me. I looked at her in a way she comprehended, for she eagerly said to me, "Come in; she asks for you."

I found mother very low; yet she recognized me and extended both hands. I cannot say what passed within me then; but when I saw her thus, with leaden-colored features, glassy eyes, and lips agitated by the chill of death, the recollection of all that she had done for me suddenly traversed my mind. The idea that I was going to lose her without having requited so much kindness struck me like a knife. I uttered a cry and threw myself in her arms.

"Come, Peter, don't grieve," she said to me, very low; "I die content, since I have seen you."

I felt that it was necessary to master my pain, and I seated myself near the bed and sought to persuade her there was hope; but she would not listen to me.

"Lose no time deceiving yourself," she said to me, in a voice which grew more feeble; "I desire to tell you my last wishes; call Geneviève."

The young girl approached; the dying woman gave her the keys to her closet and asked for many things which she designated—a watch which had belonged to my father, her wedding ear-rings, a little silver goblet, and some jewelry. She had them placed upon the bed, called one after the other of the people of the house, and gave something to each one. Mother Riviou had the silver goblet; she gave me the watch, and wished Genevieve to take the earrings. She then chose the sheet in which they should lay her out, told how she wished to be buried, and asked that there should be upon her tomb a stone cut by myself.

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We listened, keeping back our tears with great trouble, and promised all that she asked. Then the pastor came. My heart was too full; I went out to weep behind the house.

I believe that I remained there a long time, for when I reentered it was night. The pastor had gone. I heard Geneviève respond to my mother. At the first word I comprehended that the question concerned me. The dying mother, disturbed about leaving her son alone in the world, had communicated to the young girl a wish which she had the appearance of softly resisting.

"Peter Henry is too wise and good-hearted not to know what he wishes to do," she said, in a voice a little troubled.

"But, then, why do you not wish to marry him?" demanded the mother.

"I have not said that, Mother Madeleine," responded Geneviève.

"Let me speak to him, then."

"No," she quickly continued; "to-day he can refuse you nothing, and later he may repent. It is not for you to decide; neither for me, good mother; he ought to choose according to his own taste and will. Whatever he does you know well that I shall always be ready to serve him."

"Alas!" murmured my mother, plaintively, "I waited for yet this joy upon earth."

"And you shall have it if it only depends upon me," I cried, in approaching the bed. "No one can fear that I shall repent, for your choice is my choice."

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There, I have espoused Geneviève, and I can say that this has been the last gift from her who brought me into the world.

She died the next day when the clock struck twelve, holding my hand and that of Geneviève. Let God recompense her for what she has suffered, and make up to her that which I have not been able to render! A mother is too much a creditor for her children ever to pay her here below.

## CHAPTER IX

### SUDDEN MISFORTUNE



Y marriage to Geneviève put an end to my studies. Until then I had worked to become capable; once at the head of a family I should occupy myself drawing some return from my capacities.

For those who live by work this setting up of a home is a great joy and a great encouragement. The idea that one tires himself no more for himself alone fills the heart with courage; one begins to think of the to-morrow when company may arrive; in feeling that henceforth one is two he knots more tightly the cords of his scaffolding, and he adds a stanchion the more for safety. Since my wedding-day I have had many cares and black humors; more than one time, under the heavy charge of a family, I have felt the suspenders pulling on my shoulders; but when I have returned to my better self I have always found that marriage is a holy and brave thing, the best help against the bad strokes of fate, and altogether the true strength of men of good-will.

Therefore it is wise to know that your choice is well placed. Before calling thus into your own life another self, who will become your living shadow, it is good to

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look at her from the head as well as from the heart, to assure yourself that you will have near you in the house a second conscience and not a tempter. If we hesitate to take an associate in business for fear that he may take one's credit and money, how much more for a partner of existence, who can take from one his repose and honor? To tell the truth, the women who thus turn against one are very few; almost all bring into the home at least as much of uprightness, good-conduct, and devotion as the husband. They may have more little faults, but they have fewer vices. It is rare to find them hardened in evil; yet if this comes about it is oftener than not by our fault.

Those who live above us in the ease which comes of inheritance, or who gain their living without much trouble, do not know all the worth of the brave wife of a workman. She is not only the manager of his bread, she is the manager of his courage and of his probity. What temptations would not enter the dwelling if she were not there to close the door! What ugly ideas which dare not form themselves because her look searches him to the bottom! The difficulty of avowing a bad intention forces us often to remain honest; for it is not so easy as might be believed for one to declare his wickedness to another, and for both to go in an evil way. Though one does so the boldness is not equal; there is always one who is troubled, who draws back, and it is more often the woman. Usually where she is listened to all goes straight and safely.

For my part I had made a happy choice. I found in Geneviève all I had hoped, and more. Such as I had

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seen her the first day, such I found her after marriage, and such she has ever remained. I have confided to her all my projects; I have told her all my business, and she has given me counsel without too much having the appearance of it. To my mind the greatest joy of the home is in this trust, which makes the heart, like the purse, always in common. If you are sad or angry or hopeful you will find at least one to share these sentiments with you; you do not let all these little rivulets form a pond, as it were, until at length they burst the bank. That which the current of life brings to you each day is carried away by these confidences as by an overflow, and in this manner the soul keeps near its level.

Since my marriage I had imitated Mauricet. I had undertaken a little enterprise which had succeeded; but, like all those who begin, I had to bid low and work upon small resources. The good result was less in the profit than in the success. I had gained little, but I began to make myself known. Soon I found myself full of business. My exactitude and my activity had inspired confidence. Lacking capital, I obtained credit. It was necessary to have mind and hand in everything, press things vigorously, safely, and complete them at the fixed time under penalty of a downfall. The task was hard, but in the end all went well; the returns and the payments were managed so as to balance, and I hoped that my efforts would finish by relieving my elbows a little. Once master of sufficient capital, things would go themselves; only for the time being it was necessary to mount on the roof without a ladder until I made one, round by round.

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Robert came to see us often enough. I noticed with displeasure that the little savings intended for some pleasure-party, or for the toilet of Geneviève, passed invariably from the drawer of the aunt into the pocket of the nephew. I did not complain, for it was easier for me to sacrifice this little money than to afflict the excellent creature; she made up for these little prodigalities by so much work, frugality, and economy that I had the appearance of seeing nothing. In this I sought rather my peace than her advantage, and if I had had more sense I should have understood that my duty was to enlighten her. Because the defects of those who live at our side are a little matter and cause us no inconvenience it is not necessary to close the eyes, but, on the contrary, to look after and cure them.

I had gone to Burgundy to look over some work which was soon to be awarded. My absence was to last twelve days. Geneviève was alone with our boy, Marcel, who was only three years old. I have since learned from her what passed in my absence, and I will relate it.

The day after my departure Robert came to see her. He appeared troubled and low-spirited. To all questions he only responded by broken words and sighs. She kept him to dinner, but he ate nothing and became still more sad. Concerned, she pressed him more; then he said his life displeased him, and that some day he should throw it away like a pair of worn-out shoes. Geneviève, distressed, endeavored in vain to combat his discouragement; the more she talked the more Robert persevered in his resolution, giving her to under-

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stand, even, that nothing else remained for him to do. His aunt pressed him for explanation; but he persisted in his silence, intimating a guilt which he did not wish to confess. Quite frightened, she carried to his cradle the little Marcel, who had gone to sleep in her arms, and returned to Robert, decided to get his secret from him.

She found him with his elbows upon his knees and his head between his hands, like one in despair. Geneviève said everything to him that her affection could invent. She spoke to him of his father, of the promise that she had made of taking his place; she named, one after another, all the faults she could suppose him guilty of, asking him to respond alone by a word or a sign; but Robert always shook his head. Finally, at the end of all patience, she stopped, when he straightened up quickly and exclaimed that if he didn't have one hundred louis for the next day he was ruined. Geneviève started back as if he had demanded the crown of France.

"One hundred louis!" she repeated; "and whom do you expect to give them to you? Why do you need them? What do you wish to do with them?"

"I owe them," responded Robert.

And as his aunt looked at him with an air of doubt he began to unroll for her the list of his dissipations for the past three years. He had about him creditors' letters, unreceipted bills, and even assignments upon stamped paper; but the more he explained to Geneviève the more she waxed indignant and felt pity leave her.

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“Well, then, since you have been able to spend such a sum you will have to earn it,” she said, resolutely. “If I had it there in my apron and it belonged to me, and I had no use for it, you should not have the first penny! Ah, they have reason for saying that God loves us better than we love ourselves! When He took my poor brother I had accused Him in my heart, and now I see that He should have been thanked, for He has spared him grief and shame.”

“Yes,” interrupted Robert, with a sort of desperate audacity, “more shame than you believe; for I have not told all.”

“And what yet remains to be said, unhappy wretch?” cried Geneviève.

Her nephew had risen, pale, and as if beside himself.

“Well, then,” he said, showing the letters of his creditors, “it is necessary to pay all that under pain of going to prison, and I have paid it.”

“You! How?”

“With a note.”

She looked at him without comprehending.

“What note?” she demanded.

“A note signed with the name of your husband.”

“What do you say, wretched one? A forgery?”

He lowered his head; Geneviève wrung her hands and cried. Both remained an instant without speaking. At last the aunt got up again, took Robert by the shoulders and shook him.

“You have lied to me!” she exclaimed; “you do not owe one hundred louis; you have not forged a note; you wish to draw the money from me.”

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The young man raised his head and reddened.

"Ah! I have lied," he stammered; "well, then, it is no use; let us say no more about it."

He took his hat and suddenly went out.

Geneviève let him go; but she passed a terrible night. She bolted upright at every noise, believing that they came to inform her of the arrest or death of Robert; she accused herself of hardness. Twice she put on her shawl to run to the lodging of her nephew, and twice a doubt that she could not dismiss retained her. The next day, toward the middle of the afternoon, an unknown man with great whiskers and covered with rings and charms presented himself with three notes, signed with my name. They were the forgeries of which Robert had spoken!

When she saw them Geneviève became very pale, so pale that the stranger, who called himself Dumanoir, raised his eyebrows; finally, not knowing what to say, she asked him whom he held for their value.

"You can see," the stranger replied, showing on the back side the signatures of three or four indorsers.

"And you have need—immediately—of money?" said my wife, more and more troubled.

"*Parbleu!*" he replied, "I have two payments to make to-morrow, and I counted upon my returns. They told me your husband was good; I hope that they have not deceived me!"

In speaking thus he narrowly watched Geneviève, who said no more, but began to weep.

"Eh!" cried Dumanoir, "tears! Are these, by chance, all you have to give me? But are you not solv-

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ent then? Have you not the one hundred louis? Ah! a thousand thunders! I am ruined!"

He then got up with so many curses and menaces against me that my poor frightened wife revealed everything. At the announcement that the notes were forged Dumanoir made a bound.

"So I am robbed!" he cried; "and by whom? You know the forger, you are interested in him, for you did not at once reveal the fraud. I wish you to tell me who he is, or I will denounce you. I will have you condemned as his accomplice."

Geneviève was about to reply when the door suddenly opened. It was Robert. At the cry that she made Dumanoir turned toward the young man, who, seeing the notes between his hands, fell upon his knees.

There was then a scene which my wife has never been able to describe to me, because when she thinks of it the unhappiness of it overcomes her power of utterance. All that I have known is that after many tears and prayers, seeing that the man with the notes had decided to arrest Robert, and the latter clinging to the window from which he threatened to throw himself to the court below, her heart could no longer keep her back. She ran to the secretary, which served me for cash-box, took three hundred and fifty francs, which were all my reserve, and offered them to get back the notes. The creditor appeared at first to hesitate, but upon the observation that Robert was without resource and that in refusing this offer he would lose all, the exchange was made and Dumanoir left. After rapidly thanking his aunt Robert followed him.

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There was in his accent and his attitude so sudden a change that Geneviève was struck. Left alone and relieved of her emotion, she recalled all that had taken place and found something singular in it. The more she reflected the more the words and actions of Robert left her in doubt. She could not say what she suspected, but she felt that there was somewhere a lie! She hoped for enlightenment at the next visit of the young man. Two days passed without his reappearing. Geneviève, whose disquietude increased, confided Marcel to a neighbor and hastened to seek him in the Rue Bertin-Poirée.

Reaching the fifth story at the landing of the little chamber inhabited by Robert, she saw the door open and an evil-faced man come out holding a packet. Although changed in costume, and no more wearing the large whiskers, she recognized Dumanoir! Profiting by the movement of surprise which held her for an instantly speechless, he quickly passed and descended. Geneviève pushed open Robert's door; there was no one there; but the furniture drawers had nothing in them, the closets were open and empty; some worn-out clothes were scattered about the floor. Surprised at this disorder, she went downstairs to the porter's lodge to ask explanations of him. The porter knew nothing and had seen nothing. All he could say was that Robert had entered the evening before with the man that she had passed on the stairs; they both appeared to be in a joyous mood and jingled gold coins in their pockets. Geneviève could no more doubt; the scene of the notes was a comedy, agreed upon between Robert and

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the pretended creditor; they had counted upon her fright, upon her feebleness; she was the victim of a swindle of which the son of her brother was the inventor. This idea was like the stroke of a knife in her heart. She put it from her; she waited for Robert all the evening and yet the next day. She could not doubt, and yet she could not believe. Grief, indignation, disquietude, tormented her turn by turn. When I arrived she had lost, for five days, sleep and appetite. I found her so much changed that, alarmed, I demanded if she were ill.

"It is much worse," she replied, in a choking voice.

And without waiting my questions, like one who has need of easing her mind, she began telling me in broken phrases what had passed since my departure. When she came to the three hundred and fifty francs given to Robert I interrupted by an exclamation of fright. I believed I had misunderstood, and ran to the secretary. The hiding-place held only the empty bag. My throat grew parched, my legs trembled so it was necessary to support myself against the wall. Geneviève regarded me with wide-open eyes, her hands limply hanging, her lips trembling like one in a fever. Seeing her in this condition, the anger which filled my heart relaxed and I said to her, very gently:

"You have given the money; I shall not be able to pay what I owe; that is all; we are ruined!"

In fact, I had three notes due the next day, and this reserve fund was intended to satisfy them. Its disappearance deranged all my calculations, destroyed my credit. I made Geneviève comprehend the situation.

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The poor creature was so startled that I wished to hide my own torment.

This good impulse made me content with myself and relieved my heart. The courage which I had at first shown through love for Geneviève came to me, little by little. I was still young; I had done no wrong; I felt that all my strength remained to begin over again. The important thing at this time was to honor my engagements. I spoke to Geneviève quietly, tenderly, like a man. I said to her that nothing was desperate, but that it was necessary to renounce for the moment all the little comforts of the house, keeping only the indispensable things and accepting again the coarser life of the poorer workmen. She responded only by weeping and pressing my hands when I had finished.

"Ah, you are still better than I believed," she said to me. "I only ask one more thing of the good God, and that is to let me live long enough to pay you for your kindness."

God has listened to her prayer, and she has fulfilled her promise, for that which she called my kindness has been paid in happiness, interest and principal.

That same evening I called upon the other builders of my acquaintance and made over to them some jobs for a little ready money which would pay for my materials. Meantime, Geneviève had called in some furniture-dealers and sold the better part of our movables. All together made up the sum of which I stood in need. My notes were paid without default.

But the breakdown had been noticeable; every one knew that I had again reentered the regiment of the

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needy, and withdrew from me the consideration which had hitherto been accorded me. It was useless for me to bid for little contracts; no one any more wished to make me advances nor to give credit; they saw my downfall without considering my honesty. As a last unhappiness, Mauricet was absent; the need pressed; it was necessary to resume the trowel and live by day's wages.

And still Robert had not yet reappeared. In spite of all, Geneviève kept for him an incurable affection; I saw that she was sad because she did not know what had become of him. Two months had passed, and for my part I endeavored to forget the nephew, when a policeman presented himself in my home. Happily, I was alone. He showed me a bit of paper with my name and address half effaced; they had found it upon a murdered man. A little troubled, I followed the officer to the morgue and there I recognized the corpse of Robert. He had still around his neck the cord and the stone that they had tied to him to drown him. The accomplice of his theft had wished to profit alone, and, as it so often happens, the crime had been punished by a new crime.

Geneviève knew the thing only a long time after. So far the murderers have not been discovered; perhaps they have submitted in their turn to the fate which they had meted out to Robert, for in evil as in good it is rare that one does not harvest that which he sows. In regard to us, the recollection of the unhappy being who had thrown his wickedness across our happiness was soon lost in the hardest trials; the bad days approached, and we were about to be, as Friend Mauricet said, guaranteed the storm without cape or umbrella.

## CHAPTER X

### UPHILL WORK



T is a hard thing to come down again in life after one has once climbed up, and black bread seems hard to eat when the teeth have begun to soften on white bread. I presented a good face to this bad fortune; but at bottom I felt a suppressed vexation which made me unhappy and gave, as they say, a bad taste to life. Although she had a determined air Geneviève was no more resigned. We both sang to defy our ill-fortune, but not for gayety. For fear of exposing our hearts we kept silent, enveloping our sadness in our pride and growing slightly hardened. I felt it, but without power to do otherwise. I was like one who totters; to remain upright it was necessary to be rigid.

One evening I returned from work with the sack upon my shoulder, and I walked the streets whistling. I went without hurrying, for the sight of my home did not rejoice my eye as formerly. I could not accustom myself to the empty gaps in the furnishings, to the walls without hangings, and, above all, to the careworn air of Geneviève. Formerly all was neat and cheerful, everything welcomed me; within there was an eternal

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ray of the sun; but since our downfall one would have said that the cardinal points had changed; from the south we found ourselves carried to the north. I passed along then with short steps, without much noticing a fine snow which fell as through a sifter and powdered the icy roadway. Having nearly reached the end of the faubourg, I perceived an old woman wearily pushing before her one of those small wagons which are the rolling shops of the people of Paris. The ice rendered the task doubly laborious. The snow streaked the great wool shawl in which she was enveloped and filled the folds of the handkerchief upon her head. She breathed with difficulty, stopping at each minute with spent strength, then redoubling her effort. I was filled, involuntarily, with pity. The memory of my mother crossed my mind, and I joined the vender, who had stopped for breath.

"Hallo, old woman," I said to her, smiling, "that is too much for you."

"That is the truth, my son," she responded, wiping her face where the sweat mingled with the snow; "strength goes with age while the load always keeps its weight; but the good God does everything well; he will not abandon the poor people."

I asked her where she was going. She pointed out the way to me and was about to proceed. I then put my hand upon one of the shafts.

"Let me," I said to her, gently. "It is my road. It will cost me no more to go over it with your barrow."

And without waiting her response I pushed the cart before me. The old woman made no resistance: she

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simply thanked me and walked at my side. I learned then that she had come from buying provisions at the markets which she was to sell again. Whatever the season or the weather she continued to run about Paris until she had disposed of her load. For thirty years she had lived by this trade, which had yielded her the means of raising three sons.

"But when I had them tall and strong, they took them away from me," said the poor woman. "Two have died in the army and the last is upon an English prison-ship."

"So," I exclaimed, "you find yourself alone without resource than your courage!"

"And the Protector of those who have no other," she added. "The good God must have something to do in his paradise; and how would he pass his time if he did not take care of creatures like me? I can tell you, when one is old and miserable the idea that the King of all regards you, that he judges you and keeps your account, that sustains you! When I am so tired that my feet can no longer carry me, then I go down on my knees and say to Him softly what troubles me, and when I get up I always have a lighter heart. You are still too young to feel this, but a day will come when you will comprehend why they teach little children to say, 'Our Father who art in heaven!'"

I did not answer. I felt that light was come! The old woman continued to talk in the same way as far as the end of the faubourg. In all her great trials she had sought a consolation higher than earth in a world where nothing could change. Listening to her speech

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my heart throbbed. I regarded this limping old woman, with her shaking head already bent as if to take up her winding-sheet, and I was astonished to find her stronger than Geneviève and I. It was, then, true that man had need of another point of support than men, and that to keep himself firmly upon this scaffolding which composes his life it is necessary to have a cord knotted in the heavens!

When I left the old woman near the city gate she thanked me; but, in truth, it was I who owed her gratitude, for she had reawakened ideas which had slept in the depths of my mind. I reached home quite preoccupied with my encounter. This evening—why, I did not know—Geneviève was uncommonly sad; it seemed to me even that her eyes were red. We supped and said nothing. The child slept. Then we sat near the dying embers of the fire. It was only when the clock struck that Geneviève got up with a sigh. It was the bedtime hour. Then I got up also. I took the hand of the dear woman and drew her against my shoulder.

“It is too long a time that we have carried our grief all alone,” I said to her in a low voice; “let us ask God to take His part.”

And I knelt; Geneviève did the same, saying nothing. I began then to repeat all the prayers I had ever learned in my childhood and which have remained since like a deposit in a corner of my heart. As the words returned to my memory they seemed to find a sense which I had never grasped before; it was a language which I comprehended for the first time. I cannot say whether

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something similar passed through the mind of Geneviève but I soon heard her quietly weeping. When I got up she embraced me, sobbing.

"You have had an idea which saves us," she said to me. "Now that you have made me think again of God I feel that I can regain my courage!"

And, in fact, from that day everything went better in the house. Our hearts were relieved of their tension. We began again to have better thoughts. The evening prayer was always reposedful and softening. Poor old woman! While she told me the story of her life she hardly knew what good she did me. I have never since seen her, but more than once Geneviève and I have blessed her.

"It is easy to see that the times of the good fairies have not yet passed," she said to me, "since you have found one who for payment of a light service has given you a talisman of resignation."

Although forced to return to the trowel I had not lost hope of again undertaking contracts, and it often distressed me to see desirable jobs pass into other hands. One in particular tempted me because of its profit. It was needful, unhappily, to attempt it to advance a few hundred francs! I returned to the stone-yard sad enough because of my inability to seize so happy a chance, when two large hands grasped me by the shoulders. I quickly turned; it was Mauricet.

The master-mason, kept now for many months in Burgundy, had returned to Paris upon business, leaving again the same evening. He made me go to an eating-house, and, in spite of all I could say, forced me

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to eat a second breakfast with him. Prosperity had fattened Mauricet, who was dressed in a splendid vest of fine cloth, a long-haired beaver, and a cherry-silk cravat. The heart was the same, but the tone had raised a notch. Mauricet was full of self-confidence since he found himself at the head of twenty workmen. I had always seen him so modest that his assurance appeared to me simply the consciousness of his prosperity.

Since his arrival in Paris he had been vaguely informed of my downfall and wished to know all about it. When I had told him the facts he struck the table with the sealed bottle of Bordeaux which he had ordered in spite of my refusal to drink.

"A thousand thunders! Why didn't you write about the thing to me?" he exclaimed. "I should have found enough money to settle your business. What are you doing now? Come! Where are you? Cannot I put a little chalk into your mortar?"

I made known to him my position, saying a word of the job which presented itself.

"And you only need five hundred francs?" asked Mauricet.

I replied that this sum would suffice me and more. He immediately called; a waiter entered.

"A pen and ink!" demanded the mason.

I looked at him with surprise.

"You do not understand what I wish to do with this trash here; is it not true?" he laughingly said to me. "In fact, I am no more an advocate of the black and the white than in the past; but it is necessary to bray for the donkeys. When I saw then that they could only

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do business with the quill and the inkstand, my faith, I said, ‘Bring up the rear-guard!’ And to-day I use them like any one else.”

“You have learned to write!” I exclaimed.

“You shall see!” said Mauricet, winking his eye at me.

He had drawn from a portfolio a stamped paper, upon which he made me write a draft for five hundred francs. When I had finished it he signed his name in unequally written letters in imitation of print.

“Now,” he said to me, when the painful operation was completed, “present this to Périgaux, and you shall have your money on the spot. That queer signature of Mauricet is known in their shop, and I can procure money when I wish.”

They gave me the money, in fact, without any difficulty, and the next day I undertook the job for which it was designed. Everything went well at first. The work was quickly carried on and finished before the time set. I had been able from the first payments to return to Mauricet his money. This new venture brought me into the swim again, and I began to feel myself rising, when a lawsuit against our principal contractor stopped everything. My fate and that of ten others were intimately connected with his. We found our hands tied without any means of acting or of drawing out. In the mean time, the individual obligations of each one remained; the period of payment for unused materials arrived; the dues succeeded one another pitilessly. It was necessary to face all the attacks with “arms at support,” as they say; find each day some new

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expedient; obtain terms, to carry forward, to balance debits and credits. My days were employed in this profitless work. I gained nothing, and my resources were becoming exhausted. While I employed my time saving myself from failure Geneviève and the child lacked necessities.

I racked my brains without power of hastening matters. The lawsuit was always about to be judged and yet was ceaselessly deferred. One day some paper had been forgotten, another day the lawyer was absent, the tribunal took a vacation, or the opponent had asked an adjournment! Meanwhile, the weeks and the months ran along. Our poor home resembled those crews becalmed in mid-ocean, who each day reduce the ration, looking in vain to the horizon to see if the clouds announce the return of the wind. I have had hard trials in my life, but none comparable to this. Ordinarily, the misfortunes which strike us leave room for action; one can seek solace or salvation in work; but here all efforts were useless; there was nothing to do but cross the arms and wait.

At length this powerlessness rendered me gloomy and fretful. Without knowing any one else to blame, I found fault with Geneviève; taking no account of the poor creature's efforts to disguise from me our misery, of her work to soften it, one would have said that I wished the privations which she supported. At the bottom my irritation was still that of love; it came of my grief in seeing her suffer. I would have given my blood, drop by drop, to buy her comfort and repose of spirit; but my good-will was changed to bad humor

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because of my lack of success; it was like a thorn-hedge upon which I tore her in vexation because I was unable to make a covering to defend her.

One day in particular I returned more soured than common. I had passed three hours with the lawyer, who chatted with his friends and whom I heard laugh while I was gnawed at the heart. It was necessary to wait the end of their jolly stories; then, when my turn was come, I found a man who yawned in listening to me, who knew nothing of my business, and by whom I had been directed to his first clerk, then absent. I returned home then, swelling with wrath against the dispensers of justice who file away in their boxes our fortune, our repose, our honor, and who, often as not, do not know even what they have given them to protect. To finish me, I had been refused the payment of my last bill.

As if everything sought to irritate my melancholy, I found Geneviève in a festive mood. She went about singing and received me with a joyous exclamation. I rudely asked her what happy thing had happened since my departure; if we had received a fortune from America. She responded pleasantly, put her arm about my neck, and led me to the almanac suspended against the chimney.

“Well, then?” I demanded.

“Well, then! Do you not see the day, sir?” she said gayly; “it is the twenty-fifth.”

“Yes,” I replied ill-humoredly, releasing myself; “and soon it will be the thirtieth, the day when my notes fall due. A plague upon the notes and the almanacs!”

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She had an air of grieved astonishment.

"What has happened, Peter Henry?" she resumed, uneasily; "have you learned some bad news?"

"I have learned nothing, as usual."

"Then," she continued, passing an arm through mine, "put over your anxieties until to-morrow and keep to-day for happiness."

I looked at her in a way to prove that I did not understand.

"Come, ugly man!" she said, poutingly, "don't you know that it is the anniversary of our marriage?"

I had in reality forgotten it. The years preceding this anniversary were occasions of rejoicing and tender feeling, but this time it was quite otherwise. The recollection of past happiness rendered the present sufferings more bitter. The comparison which I had made in my thought excited within me a sort of despair, and I dropped into a chair muttering maledictions. Geneviève, dismayed, wished to know what was the matter.

"What is the matter?" I cried. "God pardon me! One would say that you had never heard me speak of it! What is the matter? Well, then, to be sure! I have debts which I cannot pay and creditors who will not wait. I have a lawsuit which will ruin me while I wait to gain it. I have three mouths to feed every day without any other resource than two arms which can not work. Ah! What is the matter? do you ask? I regret now that I did not break my back the day I fell from the building, because then I was only a workman without obligations and without family, and only a coffin at four francs would have settled my account!"

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All this was said with a frenzy which made the dear woman tremble; she looked at me, the tears coming in her eyes.

"In the name of God, Peter Henry, speak no more in this way," she said to me; "never tell me that you regret living unless you wish also to make me die. You have been tormented all day, poor man, and you are beside yourself; but forget for to-day these affairs and think only of those who love you."

I would perhaps have done what she asked, for her voice had touched my heart, when there was a knock at the door; a policeman entered.

"Pardon me," he said, politely; "I have come up because you are breaking the regulations, and I must report you on account of the pot of flowers in your window."

I was going to reply that he was mistaken, when Geneviève ran to the window-ledge and quickly withdrew a gillyflower, still wrapped in its leaf of white paper. She declared that she had just returned from buying it and put it in that place, where it was safely retained by many bars. The policeman listened patiently to all her explanations; but, after repeating the law regarding the offence, he took our names, informed us that we would have to present ourselves before the police-court and pay the fine, and, saluting us, retired.

This unexpected interruption and the prospect of new expense to which we were about to be condemned rudely checked my returning good-humor. When Geneviève wished to speak to me I got up exasperated, cursing the caprice which came thus to suddenly add to our misery. I strode up and down, talking in a loud, ex-

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cited voice, while my wife, pale and trembling, looked at me, saying nothing. I had broken out when she had endeavored to speak, and now her silence increased my anger. Beside myself, I seized the flowerpot, first cause of the dispute, and started for the window to throw it into the street, when a cry from Geneviève stopped me. The poor woman was near the cradle of the baby, whom I had waked up; she pressed one hand against her breast and her other was extended toward me.

“Don’t break it, Peter Henry,” she said to me, in a voice which I shall never forget; “it is the flower of our anniversary!”

I held the gillyflower between my hands, hesitating about what I should do with it. I recalled, then, that every year at this season Geneviève had celebrated the date of our marriage by the purchase of one of these flowers, which my mother had cultivated at the Bois-Riant. At this thought I felt a shaking within me; all my anger suddenly left me, it burst like a fountain from my heart. Geneviève immediately ran toward me and threw herself with the child into my arms.

When all was pardoned and forgotten we sat down to the supper-table. What had happened had hindered my wife from preparing anything; I would not let her go out to get what we lacked. We supped gayly upon bread and radishes, the gillyflower in the midst of the table perfuming our feast.

## CHAPTER XI

### FRIEND MAURICET'S TROUBLE



E had obtained a judgment which recognized our right and assured a part of our debt upon the security of the contractor, but the formalities had not yet been all fulfilled. Geneviève and I were put to all sorts of expedients, living by chance and never having in the cupboard bread for the next day.

My days were divided between some passing work, running between the parties interested in the lawsuit, and visits to the palace of justice. I have thought since that it would have been wiser to have surrendered all and begun afresh, like the child newly born; but I was allured by these few thousand francs which they showed to me always in perspective, and I could not dismiss my hope.

Months thus passed. I had lost the habit of regular occupation, my life was deranged. Instead of making my way with the workers I found myself stopped among those poor wretches who eat their dry bread to the fumes of a roast on the spit which is constantly promised them and which always turns. I employed the present to keep in the line to the gate of the future.

On top of it all the child fell very ill. I was forced

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to go to my business and leave all the cares to Geneviève; but at the first moment of liberty I hastily returned. The malady did not decrease; on the contrary I heard the wails of the poor creature and its stifled breathing. When its mother or I leaned over its bed it extended its little hands and looked at us with a supplicating air; it had the appearance of asking mercy. Accustomed to receive everything from us, it believed that we could give it health! Our voices, our caresses, encouraged it a moment; then the suffering seized it again; it repulsed us; it seemed to reproach us; it twisted its little limbs with cries which cut us to the heart. At first I had combated the mother's fears, but at length I felt incapable of saying anything; I stood there with crossed arms, displeased at her despair, which augmented my own, and not having the strength to give her any hope. The doctor also kept his counsel; he came to the child's cradle, made a hasty examination, ordered what he wished, and then disappeared without a word of consolation; one would have said it was an architect visiting mortar and stones. Sometimes I would have stopped him, grasping him by the arms and crying to him to speak and take away from us the illusion or the care; but he was too quick for me; that which was for us the source of so much anguish was for him only his day's employ.

O, the sad hours, my God! passed near this little bed! What long and cheerless nights! How I have desired at spells the power to hasten the time, thus reaching at once the depth of my wretchedness! I have since recalled having read that such an experience was still one

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of God's kindnesses. In making us feel so much anguish he renders us less sensitive to the last stroke; the unhappiness of the waiting makes it desirable; our thought runs to meet it, and when the blow strikes us we accept it as a solace.

After an illness of fifteen days the child died. I was prepared for it, but it seems that Geneviève was not. Mothers never give up those whom they have brought into the world; they cannot believe in the possibility of being separated from them. The days passed by; nothing consoled my poor wife. I found her seated before the empty cradle or handling the little garments of the dead child, giving to each one a tear and a kiss. I had reasoned with her and chided, she listening to me patiently without raising her head, like a poor heart whose spring is broken. This despondency finally infected me. I relaxed in my turn; I took no interest in anything; I passed entire hours standing before the window drumming upon the glass and gazing out abstractedly. We both became benumbed by our grief.

We had not seen Mauricet in the two years that he had lived in Burgundy; they had only told me that the old master-workman was engaged in great enterprises. Two or three times I had had the idea of informing him of my embarrassment and of asking him for a stroke on the shoulder; I hardly know what pride restrained me. Now that I supposed him among the great financiers I was less at ease with him; I feared that he would suspect me of wishing to trade on our old friendship.

We had, then, the seeming of being a little forgotten, when, one evening, I saw the new contractor arrive, not

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in a carriage, as I should have expected, but on foot and covered with a traveller's blouse over his other clothes. He descended from the *diligence* and came to us asking dinner.

At the first glance I saw a change in him. He talked as freely and as loudly as ever, he laughed at every turn, was restless, and asked more questions than he waited replies; but all this movement and all this talk appeared forced; his gayety was feverish. He scarcely spoke to us of the death of our child; when I wished to speak of my affairs he interrupted me to talk of his own. He brought notes and memoranda which he explained to me, begging me at the same time to put them in order. Although his manners had a little repelled me I did as he desired. During this work Mauricet paced about the chamber, his hands in his pockets, and softly whistling. From time to time he stopped before the sheet of paper which I had covered with figures as if he had wished to divine the result; then he resumed his whistling and his walking. It took much time to complete the calculation; when I had finished I made it known to the master-workman; the liabilities were almost double the assets. At the announcement of this result Mauricet could not restrain an exclamation:

“Are you certain of the thing?” he demanded in an accent which seemed to me altered.

I explained to him the reasons which must necessarily bring this result. The first was the numerous loans and the accumulations of interest, with which he had seemed not to trouble himself. In the absence of written accounts, he had evidently deceived himself.

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He listened to my explanations, supporting both hands upon the table and gazing into my face.

"I comprehend, I comprehend!" he said, when I had finished; "I have let enter into my stable all the horses they wished to lend me, without thinking their forage would ruin me. See where one is led when he does not know how to make your little fly-tracks, and doesn't know your conjuring-book. Those who have not a head for books ought to do business from hand to hand, and not throw in the papers. They are like the river, you see, which always finishes by drowning itself."

I asked him with concern if there were no other resources than those which I had noted, and if this was his entire schedule.

"Not at all, not at all!" he quickly continued. "You tell me there are twenty-three thousand francs lacking? Well then! I'll find them; they are elsewhere."

And, as I insisted more strongly: "But I tell you that all can be arranged!" he interrupted with impatience; "It was only to see, as they say, to the bottom of the well, and now it is done. Twenty-three thousand francs deficit! Well, then, that is good: the rest I will go all alone. Let us dine, my old friend; I am as hungry as thirty wolves."

In spite of this last affirmation he ate hardly anything; but to make up he smoked very much and talked still more; one would have said that he sought to forget himself. When we left the table the day began to wane. Mauricet gathered his papers, put them in order, regarded some time the account which I had drawn up as if he had been able to read it; he said nothing, but it

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seemed to me that his hand trembled. He afterward put them all upon the table and began walking again up and down the room, and finally asked where our son was!

Geneviève turned with a cry; I looked him in the face stupefied. When the child had died we had written him, and since he had arrived we had spoken of this loss; he perceived his distraction and took his head between his hands.

"What! Is there, then, no more brain here!" he murmured, in a sort of rage. "Pardon me, friends; it is the fault of Peter Henry; he has made me drink too much; but no matter, I should not have been able to forget your grief."

He sat down and remained some time in deep dejection. I asked him again if his affairs disturbed him.

"Why is this?" he suddenly continued. "Have I complained? Have I asked anything?" And softening, all at once, "Hold! let us speak not any more of business," he resumed; "let us talk of you and Geneviève. You are always happy; is it not true? When one loves, when one is young, and when one owes nothing! Ah! if I were of your age, I! But what! Youth cannot be and have been; each one his turn. I have already seen go by a part of those of my time—your father Jerome, Madeleine, and many others still! Away with sadness! Let us live until death takes us."

I was astonished at these signs of incoherence. Mauricet had not drunk enough to be affected to this extent; his cheerfulness did not reassure me; I saw in him a wandering air which disturbed me. As he laughed

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alone he soon stopped. Geneviève spoke gently to him of his children in the country, who were prospering in a small way. Then he softened and praised them at length; afterward he broke off suddenly, got up with a desperate effort, and said, in a broken voice:

"Come, come, friends, we have talked enough; the moment has come for me to attend to my affairs."

He looked some time for his hat, which was before him, fumbled with it as if he could not find his head, made a step toward the door, then stopped to take out his watch, which he placed upon his papers.

"I had better leave you everything," he said, stammering; "I should lose them; it is safer here."

We endeavored to retain him. He refused. I then wished to go with him. He grew angry and quickly left; but, getting half-way down the stairs, he returned.

"Come, come," he said, "let us not leave each other with bad feelings!"

He embraced my wife, pressed my hand, and disappeared.

We lingered upon the landing, much disturbed. When we no more heard his steps upon the stairs Geneviève turned quickly toward me.

"Oh, Peter Henry, there is something the matter with him!" she said.

"That is my thought," I responded.

"We must not leave Mauricet to himself."

"But he gets angry if I wish to follow him."

"Let us go together," she continued, tying her bonnet and putting on a little woolen shawl.

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I ran for my hat, and we descended. Night had come and we could not see Mauricet. We took our course to the first street turning. There, by good luck, we recognized the master-workman. He walked with a step sometimes quick, sometimes slow, making gestures, speaking in a high voice; but we could not hear what he said. He followed many streets at hazard, turning sometimes upon his steps like a man who takes no care about his route. Finally he struck the markets, and from there turned toward the quays.

Reaching the Pont du Châtelet he stopped again, then turned suddenly toward one of the slopes which descend to the river. Geneviève pressed my arm with a stifled cry. The same thought had come to us both. We ran together. The night was already black. Mauricet glided before us like a shadow. He was hidden under one of the bridge arches. When I got there he had taken off his coat and was approaching the water, which swirled in a great whirlpool at the foot of a pier. He heard us coming. He wished to throw himself in before we reached him. I only had time to seize him by the middle of the body. He turned with a curse, the darkness hindering his seeing me; he recognized me only by my voice.

"What are you doing here? What do you wish?" he cried. "Did I not tell you to leave me alone? Take away your hands, Peter Henry! A thousand thunders! I tell you, let me go!"

"No, I shall not leave you!" I exclaimed, trying to force him back toward the bank.

He made an effort to release himself.

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"But you do not comprehend, wretch, that I am ruined!" he cried. "I can no more do honor to my signature! Curse the day that I learned to put it upon paper! While I did not know how to write I kept my reputation faithfully; I had not bound myself by these notes, which God confound! But now the thing is done there is no more going back, I must be a bankrupt or die. I have chosen! Do not oppose me, Peter Henry. I am in a moment, you see, when nothing shall stop me! I am capable of anything. In the name of God, or of the devil, leave me!"

He struggled with fury. In spite of my resistance he would have escaped me, when Geneviève threw her arms around his neck and cried:

"Mauricet, think of your children!"

This was like the stroke of a club. The unhappy man groaned. I felt him totter, and he fell sitting upon the sand. We heard him weep. Geneviève knelt at one side, I on the other, and we began to encourage him, weeping with him also; but I found nothing good to say to him, while each word of Geneviève went to his heart. There is nothing like the women for this science! The master-workman, a moment before so terrible, was now like an infant, incapable of resistance. He told us, sobbing, all that he had suffered in the past eight days since he began to see clearly into his affairs. I understood then that his incapacity to keep accounts had been the true cause of his ruin. Carried away by the current of a large business, nothing had warned him of the danger, and he only knew it when he was wrecked.

I profited by this same ignorance to persuade Mauri-

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cet that all was not desperate; that his situation offered resources that he himself knew not, and that the question alone was to disentangle them. The master-workman was like all those who affect to scorn writing and figures; at the bottom he believed they held a secret power to which everything must give way. We succeeded then in bringing him back to our house, if not consoled, at least strengthened.

In truth, the peril was only delayed. I knew that by the next day the bad thoughts would return to him. I feared, above all, the kind of shame which these would-be suicides have. Lest others believe that they have been cowardly they return to their first intention with obstinacy; they regard death as the sole means of proving their courage, and out of self-esteem they kill themselves! I warned Geneviève, who promised to watch without intermission. In fact, she alone could do it without irritating Mauricet. The brave hearts are powerless against women and children.

In regard to myself, I had to see what could be done to avoid a breakdown. I passed a part of the night verifying the balance of the master-mason, but, however I figured and repeated the calculations, the deficit remained always the same. In continuing the business already engaged he had a good chance of recovering himself and "clearing up," as they say in the jargon of the trade. But for that it was necessary to have money or credit, and where could they be found? I had very much puzzled my brain without any means presenting itself. I tried everywhere the next day, but all my attempts were useless. I was sent from one to another

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with rude rebuffs. Seeing me take so much heart in the affairs of Mauricet, they believed me interested, and I injured him without serving him.

However, I persisted, decided to do my duty to the end. The master-mason had fallen into a mute discouragement. One could not expect from him any effort to help himself. When I attempted to send him out he said to me simply, "The cords to my legs are cut; leave me where I am!"

I was at my wits' end, when I recalled the rich contractor who had formerly encouraged me to instruct myself. I had often thought of him in my own embarrassment, but without wishing to ask aid from him. I always recalled our first interview, in which he had proved to me that success was the recompense of zeal and of talent. Confessing to him that I had failed was to admit that I had shown neglect or incapacity. Right or wrong, I had always recoiled from exposing myself to this confusion. For Mauricet I had less scruple.

I feared that the millionaire had forgotten my face, but at the first glance of the eye he recognized me. That was something; yet I was troubled when it was necessary for me to tell him the motive of my visit. I had well prepared my story; at the moment of uttering it I became confused. The contractor comprehended that I was in business trouble and that I came to him asking money. I saw him raise his eyebrows and tighten his lips like a man who would express defiance. This suddenly gave me back my courage.

"Pray notice that I do not come for myself," I exclaimed, "but for a brave companion who has been to

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me almost a father and whom you know—my friend Mauricet. What he asks of you is neither an advance nor a sacrifice, but only to save him from the shame of a failure without doing you any harm. It is the question of a good action which perhaps will bring you nothing, but which should not cost you anything."

"Let me see," said the contractor, who continued to regard me.

I then explained to him rapidly all the affair without making words, but without losing the thread of my discourse, and like one capitalist who converses with his equal. By force of will I had risen above myself. He listened to all, asked me many questions, demanded the papers in the case, and told me to come back the next day.

I went away hopeless. The thing seemed so clear that he could not put off responding if he had wished to accept. This adjournment had certainly no other end than of giving to the refusal an appearance of reflection. I returned, however, upon the hour agreed.

"I have examined everything," the contractor said to me. "Your calculations are right. I will take charge of the affair. You can tell Mauricet to come and see me. He is a brave man, and we will find some employment for him which shall satisfy him."

## CHAPTER XII

AT MONTMORENCY



FFTER the departure of Mauricet I busied myself winding up my own affairs. Justice had finally pronounced, and I could free myself. My debts were paid, all I had left was some stamped paper. I had satisfied all my engagements but I found myself for the second time penniless.

I was going to take up the trowel again when an architect, under whom I had worked, proposed that I should quit Paris and establish myself at Montmorency. He assured me work there for the season and promised to push me.

“It is a good place,” he said to me. “There is only one master-mason, a good workman, but brutal, and whom one employs for lack of a better. With a little effort the better part of the work will come to you. Here you will always vegetate between the great contractors, who will suppress you. It is better to be a tree among bushes than a bush in the forest.”

I too well felt these reasons to hesitate. All was soon concluded. The architect took me to the work, explained what I should do, and I returned to Paris to fetch Geneviève.

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The moment of departure was hard. It was the first time that I had left the great city to live! I was accustomed to its dirt and its pavements, as the peasant is to verdure or the odor of hay. I had my familiar streets where I passed every day. My eye was accustomed to the people and to the houses. All were become by long usage like a part of myself. To abandon Paris was to get away from at the same time my tastes, my recollections, my entire life. The neighbors who had known us for a long time came to their doors to bid us adieu. Some of them pitied us! This made me assume a cheerful face. I greeted them laughingly. For nothing in the world would I let them see my sadness. I very well felt that this forced departure was a humiliation. It proved that bad luck had been stronger than myself. I wished to protest against the defeat by having the appearance of not feeling it. As for Geneviève, who had fewer regrets, she did not try to hide her tears. Loaded with baskets and packages, the poor woman responded to all the salutations and all the wishes of a happy journey by thanks accompanied with sighs. She stopped at each door to embrace the children for the last time. I was impatient at these delays, and I went along whistling in order to keep myself in countenance. Finally, at the turn of the street, when the last house of the faubourg had disappeared, I breathed more freely.

Geneviève had rejoined me. We climbed together into the wagon which carried our poor furnishings and took the road to Montmorency. God knows how many maledictions I addressed to myself on the way at the slowness of the horses and at the halts of the driver.

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The blood boiled in my veins. Yet I kept quiet. I feared that if I spoke I should say too much. Geneviève felt like myself. At last we reached the place as the day closed.

The little lodging which I had taken was at the end of the village, in a narrow street where the wagon had trouble to pass. I opened the door with a pang at my heart. I motioned Geneviève to enter, and I returned to aid the carrier unload the furniture. I did not wish to see the disappointment of the poor woman over our miserable habitation.

She comprehended, without doubt, what I felt, for she reappeared soon upon the threshold with a smile, declaring that it was all she could wish. She aided in carrying things and putting them in place. When we had finished, the night had shut down, the wagon departed, and we were alone.

Our quarters were upon the ground floor, which was lower than the street itself. The floors had formerly been paved, but the broken tiles formed now a kind of uneven and dirty macadam. A little window, opening upon the court of a neighbor, let in smoky odors, and a high chimney, which occupied almost all the width of the gable, let fall thick volumes of smoke. I contemplated this sad den with a sort of stupor. Whether I had badly judged at the first appearance, whether my disposition was different, I now found an unwholesomeness and dilapidation which had not at first struck me. Our furnishings put in place and the presence of Geneviève, far from making the place cheerful, seemed to make it more gloomy. Adorned with all that could

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embellish it, the lodging left no possible room for doubt and showed itself in its actual ugliness. In spite of her efforts to appear satisfied Genevieve felt an uncomfortableness which she could not hide. She had seated herself by the hearth, supporting her elbows upon her knees, and looking in a fixed way before her. I was at the other end of the room with crossed arms. A little candle burning low in a tin candlestick gave us enough light to let us see our sadness. Genevi  e was the first to rouse out of this depression. She got up, sighing, sought the basket of provisions which she had brought from Paris, and began to lay the table-cloth. But bread was wanting. I went out to buy it.

The baker's shop was some distance off; when I entered many neighbors were gathered upon the threshold; they were listening to a large man who spoke very loudly and with an appearance of anger. I paid no attention at first, while I waited for the loaf which some one had gone to get in the back shop, when I heard my name pronounced by the large man.

"He names himself Peter Henry, called the Conscientious," he exclaimed; "but you may wring my neck if I don't change his name into that of the Famished. Even if I have to sell my last shirt I will make him more bother and do him more mischief than are necessary to ruin him!"

"In fact, if we let these Parisians establish themselves in the country they will eat our bread to the last mouthful," observed a neighbor, from whose black hands I recognized a blacksmith.

"Without taking into account that they always end

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in bankruptcy," added the grocer. "In proof, there is the watchmaker from the great city, who has gone off without paying me."

"And look you, the new master-mason will not have a better memory," resumed the large man. "It is my opinion that he is some sharper who has come here to hide from the police."

Until now I had listened without knowing whether I ought to have the appearance of hearing; but at these last words the blood mounted to my head and I turned toward the door.

"Peter Henry has no need of hiding from anybody," I exclaimed, "and the proof is that it is he who speaks to you."

There was a general movement among the spectators. The large man approached the doorsill.

"Ah! ah! do we see the bird here?" he said, regarding me with an insolent air. "Well, I should not have recognized him from the plumage; for a master from the great city he has an appearance a little too simple."

"You shall see from the work I know how to do," I replied, sharply. "Insults only prove jealousy or malice; it is by his work that the workman must be judged."

"It remains to be seen whether any one wishes your work," resumed the master-mason, gruffly. "You have taken away from me one customer; but if you take away a second, as true as I am named Jean Fèrou I will break your back at the first chance."

I felt that I became pale, not from fear, but from vexation. This large face, red with anger, and those

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little gray eyes, which shot out menace, stirred my blood. I looked the master-mason in the face.

“We shall see about that, Master Fèrou!” I replied, restraining myself. “The people whom one wishes to crush do not always allow it. Until now I have defended my skin against many a bad fellow, and I shall hope not to leave it at Montmorency.”

“Well, then, all right!” cried the master-mason, who pushed back his cap. “We shall see what you know how to do with your fists. I’ll settle the matter here and now, and it shall not be said that Jean Fèrou will let the grass be cut under his feet by a bungler from Paris.”

I did not respond; my anger increased, and I felt near exploding. I quickly took the bread which I had come to buy, and was going out, when the baker demanded payment. I replied that I had put the money on the counter; but the baker declared that he had not received it. A dispute ensued, which the interference of the master-mason helped to sharpen. Feeling my honor at stake, I sustained my affirmation with persistence. In the heat of the strife a little girl who was present declared, in a low voice, that I held the money hidden between my fingers. I quickly opened my hand; was it truly there? In my trouble I had taken from the counter a twelve-sous piece and held it without knowing it!

The movement among the spectators at this revelation made me dizzy. I wished to stammer an explanation, but, feeling myself suspected, I was in doubt. I was unknown, surrounded by ill-disposed people, without any means of proving that my error had been invol-

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untary. I comprehended that all my justifications were useless; so, suddenly cutting short, I paid the baker and turned to leave.

The master-mason stood at the opening of the door, one shoulder leaning against the casing and his feet propped against the other side. He sneeringly regarded me.

"Missed the trick!" he said to me, ironically; "for to-day he has to pay for his bread at the regular price."

"Let me pass!" I cried, out of patience.

"Why! why!" he resumed, in a tone more and more provoking, "one would say that the Parisian gets angry."

"The Parisian has had enough of your insults," I replied, trembling with anger, "and you must make room."

"Truly! And if I don't wish to?"

"Then I'll make it!"

"Ah, indeed! Come on, then!"

I advanced resolutely to him; he was leaning against the wall with crossed arms.

"Jean Fèrou, will you let me go out?" I demanded, with closed fists.

"No," he said, sneeringly.

I seized him by the arm and pushed him roughly to force him to make room for me.

He doubtless did not expect such boldness, for he was on the point of losing his balance; but he regained himself immediately with an oath, turned upon me with raised hand, and struck me a blow on the head which stunned me. I endeavored to put myself on the defen-

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sive, and sustained the struggle until I tripped against the doorsill, drawing the master-mason in my downfall. Falling under him, I soon felt his knees upon my chest, while his fists pounded my face. The spectators, who had let him alone until then, decided, finally, to separate us. They pulled Master Fèrou off from me with trouble; they put under my arm the bread which I had bought, showed me the road, and I mechanically took the way to my lodging.

I went like a drunken man; all my limbs ached, and I was broken-hearted. At the sight of the house I relaxed my steps; I feared the questionings of Geneviève when she should see my bruised and bloody face. I could not sustain the idea of relating to her the humiliations which I had suffered. Happily, she had yielded to the day's fatigue; I found her in bed and asleep.

I hastened to put out the candle, which still burned, and got into bed. But I sought sleep in vain; I was devoured by a furious rage. Hate of the master-mason possessed me; I wished him now all the evil that he had wished to do to me; I sought by what means I could injure him and revenge myself. Everything else was indifferent to me. I inwardly demanded the aid of the good God against my enemy. Reflection, instead of calming me, excited my bad thoughts more and more. My rancor was like an abyss which increased in depth the more I gave way to it. If I slept from time to time it was to dream angry dreams. Sometimes I saw Master Fèrou ruined, with the beggar's sack upon his shoulder; sometimes I had him under my feet, where he held me, and I forced him to cry for mercy; at other

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times I saw him with bound hands between four gendarmes, who led him to the prison for thieves while I showered upon him insults and jeers.

In the midst of these nightmares I was awakened with a start by Geneviève. I sat upright in bed; a great light shone into our dwelling; we heard outside a tumult of voices, the noise of people who seemed to be running. Then the cry "Fire! fire!" resounded. I jumped from the end of the bed, hastily dressed, and went out. Two men came running along the street.

"Where is the fire?" I asked.

"At the yard of Jean Fèrou," they responded, both together.

I suddenly stopped. One would have said that God had heard my prayers, and that He had taken it upon himself to revenge me. I must confess it now, the first feeling was that of satisfaction; but it lasted no longer than a flash; almost at once I felt remorse for my joy. With the return of better feeling it seemed to me that I was more obliged than any one else to help the master-mason and to compensate by action my evil wishes. This idea was like a flame darting through my heart. I ran at once with the people who were passing and reached Fèrou's yard.

The fire, at first confined to a shed, had soon spread. At the moment of my arrival the piles of beams and battens formed around the house a circle of flame which hindered approach. Workmen ran in the midst of the smoke taking away the burning material. I joined them, and we finally cleared a passage. Reaching the house, we found it locked. Some one cried that Jean

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Fèrou ought to be with his brother at Andilly, but many others responded that they recognized him that same evening in the village; one of them had even seen him enter, as he said, with "a drop of tea in his head and a bottle under the arm." Drunk and asleep, he had, without doubt, heard nothing.

Meanwhile the danger became more and more pressing. The fire, which was extending from behind, had passed already to the roof of the house. We knocked in vain at the closed door; we called the master-mason with all the strength of our lungs; there was no response! At this moment there was above our heads a frightful cracking, and the loosened tiles began to fall with a shower of embers. The roof had fallen; everybody fled. Jean Fèrou, at last awakened, appeared at one of the windows.

Surprised in his drunkenness, and still confused, he looked out with exclamations of fright without seeming to comprehend his plight. Everybody shouted to him at the same time to come down and flee; but the unhappy man, beside himself, continued to watch the flames which ran across the yard, repeating, with a lamenting accent, "The fire! the fire!"

Two or three of us decided to return to the house. The fire began already to break through the floors. We shouted to the master-mason that the least delay would cost him his life. He seemed finally to comprehend, for he quickly reentered, as if he had decided to reach the door, and we drew near to aid him. From the sparks which gushed across the shutters of the ground-floor we saw that the flames had invaded at the

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same time both the lower story as well as the upper. Jean Fèrou soon reappeared at the window, crying that the stairs were on fire and demanded a ladder. Some ran to seek one; but in the midst of this disorder and destruction it seemed doubtful if they could find it in time. The fire on the lower story increased rapidly; instead of snapping, the flames began to roar in the interior like a furnace. Jean Fèrou, loaded with papers and bags of money, was astride the window-sill, crying for some one to aid him in descending; but those who were nearest remained immovable through fright or lack of power. All at once I felt myself seized with a courageous spirit; the idea of the danger disappeared, and I only saw that there was a man to be saved.

I ran to one of the windows of the ground-floor, and by the aid of a shutter I reached the cornice of the first story. There my shoulders were almost on a level with the feet of the master-mason; I cried to him to let them serve him as a point of support. Fèrou, whom the situation had sobered, did not need to be told a second time. Drawing his legs through the window, he slipped down upon me. His weight at first made me lose my balance; I tottered, but, clutching at the wall, I sunk my nails in the joints of the stones, to which I held by a strong effort, and the mason, using my body for a ladder, reached the ground without accident.

It was only when I had rejoined him that he recognized me. He started back several steps, carried his hand to his head, and after stammering some vague words which I could not understand seated himself upon the remains of a charred beam which still smoked.

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So many events in quick succession had astounded him; he was without strength to express himself or to give thanks. Perhaps he also lacked the will. Jean Fèrou had a heart whose sentiments were as difficult to draw out as the angles in a stone. Even not to treat one as an enemy required an effort. His wife had been obliged to leave him after eighteen years of torment and of patience; his children had sought outside of his home the bread of strangers, and of all those with whom he had worked and lived not one was his friend. Under obligations to me after the fire in his timber-yard, he refrained from injuring me; but that was all. When I met him he passed along as if he had not seen me; if any one spoke to him of me he said nothing, or suddenly left; the bear had simply quit biting without becoming tamed.

Happily the witnesses of the service rendered compensated me for this coldness. They told how I had conducted myself with the master-mason, and they felt all the more good-will when they learned at the same time what I had suffered from him the previous evening. Simply doing my duty appeared like generosity, and every one paid me in esteem what Jean Fèrou had refused me in gratitude.

After struggling along two years the master-mason suddenly left the country without saying anything, and I have never heard him mentioned since.

Soon a son and a daughter consoled us for the loss of our first child. Love, joy, comfort, and health formed the four corners of our home. Geneviève sang all the

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day; the little ones grew and prattled; the money came of itself to our box; good luck shone upon us like a cloudless sun. I can say that this time was the happiest of all my life, for it was then that I best felt God's kindness. At length one gets accustomed to happiness and claims it as the payment of a debt, instead of receiving it as a gift; but then I was not spoiled by Providence; I had still upon my lips the bitterness of pain and misery, which made me feel all the better the good taste of the bread of prosperity.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PROSPEROUS YEARS



THE first five years of our establishment at Montmorency have not left many recollections. I simply recall that work became more and more plentiful, and those who had the appearance of scorning me when I first came no longer passed me without carrying their hands to their hats. I was thenceforth a personage in the country. Having leased the building-yard of my old competitor I was established there with Geneviève. We had carpeted the house, repainted the old ceilings, hung the windows with white curtains, planted Bengal roses on both sides of the door. One corner of the lot had been set off into a garden. There my wife planted flowers and dried her linen; she had caught there a stray swarm of bees which at length gave us many hives. Our son and daughter grew like poplars, running among our flower-borders and singing in a way to silence the birds. Tranquillity and happiness had settled upon our home. I recollect this time only by a vexation which very soon became a pleasure.

It was at the birth of the little Marianne. We had for neighbor a Paris lady worth one hundred thousand

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francs, and good in proportion—a true providence for all who approached her. I had built walls in her park to her entire satisfaction, and she had, besides, taken a liking for Geneviève, who had laundered her linen. So two or three months before the birth of the little one she asked to be its godmother—an offer which the mother and I gratefully accepted. The child came into the world with good promise of living; and I was in the happiness of the first moment when Mauricet visited us. I had not seen the master-workman since his unhappy experience in Paris; but I knew that the contractor who employed him had made his place comfortable, and that he had once more taken up life with a good heart. Indeed, I found him as talkative, as jovial, and as active as in his best days; age had simply made him a little stouter. He embraced us again and again, and could not keep from weeping.

"I have seen your yard," he said to me, both hands resting upon my shoulders, with his humid eyes close to mine; "it seems that you are making things go, my boy. You are making provisions for the winter of old age. That is well, my fine fellow! The success of friends does me good!"

I answered him that everything, indeed, went forward as I wished, and I rapidly explained to him my position. He listened to me, seated near the bed of Geneviève, our little Jacques upon his knees, and looking at the new arrival which slept in its cradle.

"Well, hurrah!" he cried, when I had finished; "brave people ought to prosper; that does honor to the good God! I wanted to know where you were, and

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that is why I have asked of the patron a few holidays."

"So you will remain with us," said Geneviève, with a visible satisfaction.

"If that is what you wish," replied Mauricet. "I have come only to see you. After so long a separation I hungered and thirsted for you."

He took me again by the hands.

"And then," he added, turning toward my wife, "I knew that there was a little one in the cradle, and I have nursed an idea—an idea which has rejoiced me for three months."

"What idea?" asked Geneviève.

"That of bringing you a godfather for the infant."

"A godfather?"

"And behold him!" he finished, slapping his breast. "You will never find one of better will, nor one who loves you more."

Geneviève could not restrain an uneasy movement, and we exchanged glances; Mauricet noticed it.

"Have I come too late?" he demanded. "Have you already chosen?"

"A godfather—no," stammered the mother; "we have only a godmother."

"Then that is right," resumed the master-workman. "You will present her to me. Meeting you again here, you see, gives me a taste for mirth. We must enjoy ourselves to the utmost! I wish a model baptism, with sugar-plums and rabbit-stew. Ah! come now, the godmother is not disagreeable at least?"

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I replied with a little embarrassment that it was Madame Lefort, our rich neighbor.

"A lady!" repeated Mauricet; "excuse her insignificance a little. Here is an honor! Then I must know how to carry myself. But be calm; I know how to have a certain style upon occasions. I will buy a pair of knit gloves!"

We had not had time to reply when the neighbor herself entered. I was for a moment speechless; Geneviève raised herself in bed. The position became truly embarrassing. It was becoming still more so, when Madame Lefort recalled the promise which she had made us, and declared that she had come to have an understanding with us in regard to the godfather.

"What!" exclaimed Mauricet, straightening himself; "a godfather? Present! I have come for that from Burgundy. Is this madame whom I see and who ought to be my friend? I am delighted with the favor! We must have an understanding about the sugar-plums."

Madame Lefort looked at us in astonishment. Geneviève had become very red, and picked at the down of her coverlet without daring to raise her eyes. There was a continued silence, during which Mauricet, who noticed nothing, trotted Jacques upon his knee to the familiar ditty:

"To Paris, to Paris,  
Upon a horse of gray;  
To Rouen, to Rouen,  
Upon a horse of brown."

"This changes everything," the neighbor finally said in a tone a little dry. "I came to propose naming the

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infant with my brother, the prefect's counsel. I was not aware that you had made your choice without my knowledge."

"Will Madame excuse us?" I responded; "we had thought of no one; it is the master-workman, who, in arriving, just now made us the proposition."

"And we intended to speak to Madame," added Geneviève.

"Wait a minute," interrupted Mauricet; "I do not wish to inconvenience any one. What I have said was from affection. I would have liked to name the little one, seeing that a goddaughter is half a daughter; but my good-will ought not to do her harm, and if Peter Henry finds a better he must not inconvenience himself."

He was slowly getting up; the jovial expression on his good face had disappeared. Geneviève and I made together a gesture to retain him; we had taken our resolution with the same heart.

"Stay!" I exclaimed; "one can never find a better than an old friend like you."

"Especially as Madame Lefort knows you," added Geneviève.

And turning toward the neighbor with a supplicating smile: "It is the brave Mauricet," she continued, "the old-time tutor of Peter Henry, of whom I have often spoken to Madame; he who has helped him, after God, to be an honest man. When Mother Madeleine died he led the mourners, and when we were married he led us to the church. In happiness, as in sadness, he has always been with us. Madame will comprehend that

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he has a right to continue his profession of protector toward our children."

"You are right," said Madame Lefort, whose face had regained its serenity; "the new friends ought not to usurp the place of the old. Monsieur Mauricet, we shall name him together."

"Well, then," cried the master-mason, touched even to tears, "I will say that you are a fine woman! But you shall not regret what you have done, for if I am in the rough, like the wood not yet squared, I know what one owes to well-born people. Madame has nothing to fear; she shall be satisfied with me."

Our neighbor smiled and changed the conversation. She showed herself very polite with Mauricet, who, after her departure, declared that she was the queen of great ladies. In regard to us, he pressed our hands in his own with an expression of gratitude which affected me.

"Thanks, friends," he said to us in a voice full of feeling; "if I should live a hundred years you shall see that I will never forget this hour! You have not been ashamed of your old comrade, and you have risked for him the loss of a rich patronage. It was brave, it was just. God will recompense you."

The baptism passed off to the satisfaction of everybody. Mauricet had the manners of a prefect, and Madame Lefort displayed no discomfort at such a god-father.

After some days passed with us the master-workman went away satisfied with everybody. We wept a little in saying adieu, Mauricet expecting no more to see us. "And now we are to be separated until the last judg-

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ment," he said; "no matter, the last meeting will have been happy. This is not so common a thing, you know, that of meeting after a long absence and separating again without having anything to awaken reproach on one side or the other. You are on the highway to fortune, child; do not force the relays, and keep on the road, looking out for the ruts. I leave you here a little Christian who shall remind you of me. And you, Peter Henry, who write as easily as one speaks, do not be lazy; send me, from time to time, a letter telling me about your home; since the devil has invented writing, it is necessary to serve him well!"

He embraced us again, returned to the cradle of his goddaughter, to look at her sleeping, then departed.

The kind of presentiment which he had on leaving us was realized; I never saw him afterward, though he lived, thank God, long years. From time to time workmen brought me verbal news with little presents for Marianne. The good mason was, they said, always brave with the work and warm for his friends; the contractor, who had seen his capability, left him master of his part of the business. Mauricet thus grew old, happy and useful, without ever believing that he had merited a better position. He was, as they say, a simple heart who had no idea of making the divisions of life over again after the good God. There came a year when I heard, simply, of his sudden sickness and end. He had come to the building-yard less stout-hearted than common, had been drenched by rain without quitting work, and, taken with a fever in the evening, he had breathed his last sigh the next day. Soldier

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of work, he had died, so to speak, upon the field of battle.

It was hard news for us. Geneviève loved him with a special friendship; she made the little Marianne wear mourning for him. He was the last witness of our youth who had gone; he was our last relative by adoption whom they put under the earth. Now, our family began with us; our children, little by little, would replace us; we had entered the decline at the bottom of which opens the gate of the cemetery. Happily, one does not linger over these ideas. Men live, as the world turns, under the will of God. It is for Him to think and for us to submit ourselves.

Jacques and Marianne grew without giving us care and without feeling it; it was the good-humor of the house. The boy already went among the workmen and learned by looking at them; the little girl followed her mother everywhere, as if she needed to see her, to laugh with her, and to embrace her.

Meanwhile, Madame Lefort took her away from us at times. She, too, had a daughter, who had conceived a warm friendship for Marianne, and would only play or work with her. Every day the child came with some new present; it was fruit, a plaything, jewelry even. More than one envied us these generosities; as for me, I was grateful for them, but simply because of the friendship which they proved; I was happier at the caresses of our little neighbor than at her gifts.

To tell the truth, Madame Lefort had not any false pride. Our child was always treated as the equal of her daughter, to whom even she often offered her as an ex-

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ample. All progressed happily up to the time when M. Lefort accepted duties which forced him to return to Paris. On learning that she was about to leave Marianne his daughter broke into loud cries; they had to make her many promises; nothing could console her. Finally, the day before departure, Madame Lefort came to us while we were at supper; she was followed by a maid-servant who departed after setting down a box. Our neighbor sought a pretext to have the children go out, leaving us alone.

"I have come to talk with you of serious things," she said; "do not begin by answering, and listen to me with all your heart and all your reason."

We promised her.

"I have no need to speak to you of the attachment of Caroline for Marianne," she resumed; "you have witnessed it, and you have been able to judge. My daughter is accustomed to live most of the time with yours; she needs her to learn how to be happy. Since she has been in fear of separation she has had no more taste for anything; she refuses all work and all pleasure; one would say that a part of her life had been taken away."

Geneviève interrupted her to express her gratitude for such an affection.

"If it is true that you are grateful to her," continued Madame Lefort, "you can prove it; your daughter is to Caroline a sister by choice; permit that she become a veritable sister."

"How is that?" I demanded.

"By confiding her to us," she replied.

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And, as she saw that we both started, she exclaimed: "Ah, recollect your promise; you have engaged to listen to me to the end. I do not come proposing to tear Marianne from your love, but simply to let her accept ours. The question is not of taking her away from her family; we wish to give her a second. I shall have a child the more without your having one the less, for all your rights shall remain to you, and your daughter shall return to you as often as you wish."

Geneviève and I spoke together, raising objections.

"Wait," Madame Lefort interrupted anew; "let me tell you everything. What you wish, above all—is it not true?—is the happiness of your child; your dearest wish is to assure her a tranquil future? Well, then, I take this obligation upon me. Not only shall Marianne receive the same education as my daughter, and divide all her diversions, but I engage myself to assure her position, to give her a dowry. I have only one daughter, and I am rich enough to give myself this pleasure."

The proposition was so extraordinary, so unexpected, that we were troubled; she perceived it, and, rising, "Reflect," she said; "I do not wish to surprise you; tomorrow you will give me your answer. I will then take measures that my promises shall become a formal and written engagement."

Geneviève seized her hand and wished to say how much she was touched by such kindness.

"Do not thank me," continued Madame Lefort; "what I do is for my daughter much more than for yours; in acquiring for her a devoted companion I shall enrich her. You will find in this box one of Caroline's

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gowns; it is designed for her adopted sister. I feel how this explanation has moved you; I, myself, you see, have hardly been able to keep from weeping; so I desire to avoid a second talk upon the subject. If you decide to accept my proposition bring Marianne to me to-morrow in her new costume; this shall be a proof that Caroline can regard her as a sister; otherwise, spare my poor child and me the grief of adieu."

At these words she saluted us with her hand and went out. I remained motionless before the door with lowered head and hanging arms. Geneviève dropped upon a chair, covered her face with her apron and began to sob. We remained so a long time, saying nothing, but comprehending each other by our silence. The same combat was going on in both our hearts. In spite of what Madame Lefort had been able to say, we well felt that in confiding Marianne to her we renounced the best part of our rights, that the child changed her family and that we could do no more than hope to keep second place in her affection; but the advantages proposed were great. However prosperous for the time my position was I knew, by experience, that one hour or another could change everything. A failure had only to compromise my credit, a sickness to derange my affairs, my death to expose those who survived me to poverty. What Madame Lefort offered us was painful for Geneviève and myself, but profitable for Marianne. If, in thinking of ourselves, it was foolish to refuse, in considering only our daughter it was perhaps prudent to consent. This last idea finished by persuading us. After all, parents live for their children, not for

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themselves. Each one of us had made these reflections, and when we came to converse we had both of us reached the same conclusion. Geneviève wept; although I was no more courageous I endeavored to strengthen her.

"Let us be calm," I said to her, in a low tone, for fear of weeping too; "the question is not of weakening but of doing our duty. Why afflict ourselves if our child will be happy? Rather thank God for giving us the occasion of a sacrifice to her profit; it is proof that He esteems and loves us."

However, I did not sleep well this night, and I got up the next morning at early daybreak; Geneviève was already up preparing the clothing brought the evening before by Madame Lefort. She made no complaint, expressed no regret; she had a brave nature, and never questioned that which she believed necessary. When Marianne awoke she began to dress her silently in her new costume. The little girl appeared at first surprised; she wished to know why they gave her these fine clothes of a demoiselle; and as her mother, who had finished dressing her, wished to press her a last time in her arms, she drew herself away, warning her not to disarrange her fichu.

Geneviève gave a feeble cry and broke into tears. I myself had trembled; a curtain was torn from my eyes. I took the child by the hand, I made her quickly enter the next room, and I turned toward the mother, who continued to weep.

"Listen," I said to her, in a low voice, "we have decided to give away the child for her own interest; but

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we must know in wishing to be useful to her that we are not doing her an injury."

"Ah, you have seen, then, as I have," stammered Geneviève.

"I have seen," I replied, "that the fine dress has made her forget that she is going to live far from us, and that vanity already smothers her heart."

"She loves her toilet better than my kisses," said the mother, redoubling her tears.

"And this is only a beginning," I added. "We may by great sacrifice deprive ourselves of the child that we love, but not consent to its spoiling. I do not wish that Marianne shall become richer if the condition is that she shall become bad. Yesterday we saw only one side of the thing, that of interest; there is another more grave, that of morality. In living like a lady the child will forget very quickly whence she came; who knows if the time will not come when she will be ashamed of us? This cannot be, this shall not be! Go, take away her costume, Geneviève, and remain her mother, in order that she may remain worthy of being your daughter."

The poor woman threw herself into my arms and ran and undressed the little one. We let Madame Lefort depart without saying adieu, as she had asked us; but I wrote to explain to her as well as possible our position. She did not reply, and we have had no more communication with her. She could not, doubtless, pardon us our refusal.

In the mean time, the architect to whom I owed my position at Montmorency continued well-inclined toward

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me. He gave me all the work that he could and neglected no occasion to increase my profits. I regarded him as the true author of my success, and I wished nothing so much as to see him prosper. Unhappily, he was a man whom pleasure enticed. Confident in his skill and his activity, he believed he was able to meet everything, and never took any account with his fancies. The summer-house which he had built had become the rendezvous of a brilliant society. There were only gala days and feastings, without speaking of gambling and card-playing. I soon noticed that his affairs were getting embarrassed. He deferred payments, asked advances, accepted all the business he could. His credit suffered at first, then his reputation. They spoke in a whisper of his overcharges, of bribes received. I repelled these accusations as calumnies. For my part I had always found M. Dupré easy in business, but loyal.

A Parisian company had confided to him for two years the direction of a brickfield and certain quarries, the working of which had reached, thanks to his activity, great proportions. Yet the enterprise, prosperous in appearance, had not realized, so far, any profit. Those interested supposed that the frequent and forced absences of M. Dupré favored the dishonesty of some inferior employé. They thought that an oversight of the details was indispensable, and proposed this to me. Before accepting I wished to consult M. Dupré himself. He appeared embarrassed, but after having hesitated some seconds, "If it is not Peter Henry it will be some other," he said, as if to himself. "'I had better do business with an acquaintance than with a stranger.'

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He advised me, then, to accept, but counselled me not to trouble myself beyond measure, to let things follow their course, and in any case to do nothing without informing him.

I immediately entered upon my new duty. The workings appeared to me in excellent shape, well equipped and vigorously conducted. In seeing the organization of the business I could not comprehend why it had not given more satisfactory results. Curiosity led me at first to seek the cause, then honesty obliged me to pursue it. From the first examination I had detected considerable embezzlements. I succeeded in drawing up a list and estimating the value; they amounted to a sum in the neighborhood of twenty thousand francs. Troubled by my sad discovery, I went to see M. Dupré, to whom I communicated it. At the first word he made an exclamation. I believed that he doubted, and I put under his eyes all the proofs. When I had finished he asked if I suspected any one. I answered that I did not; the thing had happened before my entrance into the business.

"Then do not speak of it to any one," he said, quickly. "Act as if you were ignorant of everything. Remember you have seen nothing."

I raised my eyes, stupefied. He was very pale, and his hands trembled. A terrible ray of light crossed my mind. I recoiled in regarding him. He carried his clenched hand to his forehead with despair. I could not restrain a cry.

"Keep quiet, unhappy one!" he resumed, in a tone which frightened me. "This is only a momentary

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irregularity. My affairs will reëstablish themselves and I will make good the loss to the interested parties. But remember that the least indiscretion may ruin me!"

He explained to me then at length the embarrassment in which he found himself, unfolded all his plans to me, and made a list of his resources. I listened to him, but without understanding. I was astounded. I only regained my presence of mind when he asked me to continue and not too closely examine things for some weeks. The sense of my responsibility came back to me then in full force, and I comprehended that my situation was dreadful.

"Excuse me," I replied, stammeringly, "I can ignore that which was confided to others, but not that which has been put under my care. From to-day I shall abandon my place of overseer."

"So they will give me another who will make the same discoveries and who will hold me at his mercy," exclaimed the architect, bitterly. "I hoped to find in you more accommodation, Peter Henry, and, above all, more memory."

"Ah, do not think that I have forgotten anything, sir," I cried, stirred to the bottom of the heart. "I know that I owe all to you and that what I have belongs to you."

He started impulsively.

"Do not take what I say for words," I added, more loudly. "By uniting my resources I can have in a few days twelve thousand francs. In the name of God, take them! You must endeavor to procure the rest and free yourself."

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I wrung my hands. M. Dupré remained some time without responding. He was himself very agitated. At last he said to me, with despondency, "It is impossible. I thank you, Peter Henry, but it is too late. I should ruin you without saving myself. You do not know all."

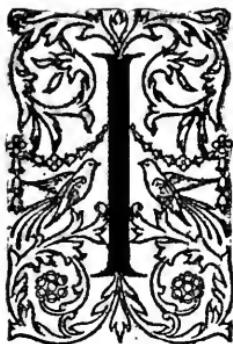
He stopped himself. I dared not look at him, and I could not speak. He resumed, after a silence, "Do what you wish. Give your resignation. All I ask of you is silence concerning that which you would not have known."

He took leave of me with a gesture, and I went away much troubled.

About a month later a great enterprise was proposed to me which would take me to Burgundy. What had happened with M. Dupré decided me to accept it. The sight of him rendered me unhappy, and the secret which I held made me tremble. In going away it seemed to me I should leave that behind. Unhappily, others came to know it. I learned soon after that all had been discovered, and that at the thought of public dishonor my old patron had lost his head and killed himself.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WHEN AGE STEALS ON



T is a long while since this journal of my recollections was interrupted. The lines written upon the last page have had time to blanch; and I, I have whitened too, like them, without perceiving it. The foundation walls are still solid, but the building has lost its appearance of youth. Geneviève herself is no more what she was; the wrinkles have come at the corners of her eyes. Happily what remains to her makes the cheerfulness of the home—good health and a good heart. Besides, if we decline, there are those near us who mount up; the children are here and will replace us; it is for them now that the sun shines. Life resembles a ball; when one is too old to dance he looks at the others, and their joy makes his heart laugh.

This is the word of Geneviève. At each pleasure lost she consoles herself with the pleasures of the daughter and of the young people. Their good teeth replace the teeth which she lacks, and their black locks hinder her seeing her own gray hair. People who live alone never know this happiness. The entire world has the appearance of declining with them, and everything here below

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ends in their grave. But for those who have a family nothing is finished, for all begins anew; children continue even to the judgment day! I sometimes asked myself, in my unhappier hours: What profit comes of living rightly? Now, there is one at least which I know —that is, the power of growing old with impunity. In youth it costs something, at times, to do one's duty; the effort is dull and the day long; but later, when age has cooled the blood, one gathers what he has sown. Our efforts pay us in good reputation, in comfort, in security, and our well-being, even, becomes like a certificate of honor.

Then the family is here which benefits by our past, joyfully receiving the returns of all our bygone sufferings; if there were no other recompense this should suffice, and whatever God had required we would be able to hold him released. For my part, I ask nothing. Here are the children, who have grown without sickness, who love us, and who have good hopes. What more could be asked? Jacques is already the best master-mason of the country; he will yet prove that he will not make the worst contractor. Yesterday they put the cap-sheaf upon the little viaduct, the construction of which was confided to him, and the engineer, who rarely praises, confesses that it is well done. As for Marianne she has replaced her mother for many months in the laundry. Geneviève is sure that all will go well when she takes a hand, the workwomen sing the louder and work not less vigorously. It is only the young who know how thus to season work with gayety.

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God be blessed for having put both in such a good way! At one time I trembled, for they also have had their temptations, Jacques above all, who was on the point of turning up another road and escaping us.

- Jacques has become the first workman of the country. No one else measures a piece of work at the first look, and the best accountant can not make a calculation quicker. Besides this, he is a good companion, easy at laughing, but with a firm hand when it is necessary; a true leader of men, and who knows how to get along without being led.

Marianne is always the same good girl, who sings, who laughs, who embraces you, and does everything easily. I seem to see in her her mother as I saw her the first time. Wherever she is, she is like a ray of the sun. The great Nicholas, our overseer, has noticed her; she is a brave worker, for whom we shall easily find a place in some family; so I shall say nothing and let her go. To-day she has left with everybody for a festival at the village. This is why I am alone, and this is why I have brought myself to write these pages.

These shall be the last, for the rest of the book has served for accounts. My pen has got to the end of the white paper. I must, then, say adieu to my adventures of the past, but not to the recollections which they have left. These recollections, I have them here around me, living and transformed, but always present. First, it is Geneviève, then the daughter and the boy, the warm comfort within and the good reputation without. When I shall have nothing to relate, you shall be able to read

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everything here. The confessions of the workman are most often written in his home itself, sad or joyful, comfortable or miserable, according as he has taken his life by the good or bad side; for with all men old age is what their youth and middle-age have made it.







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